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INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION

ASSEMBLY – 35TH SESSION

PLENARY

Agenda Item 2: Statements by delegations of Contracting States and of Observers

STATEMENT

(Presented by India)

**President of the Council of ICAO,
Secretary General,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen;**

1. On behalf of the delegation of India, it is my privilege to make this brief statement to this august Assembly. At the outset, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of Canada, the Province of Quebec and the city of Montreal for the warm welcome they have accorded us. I carry the greetings of the people and the Government of India to all the distinguished delegates who are present here from all over the world.

2. It is now well recognised that the speedy and sustained development of civil aviation is one of the key elements for overall economic development. In this context, the role of ICAO in the co-ordinated development of this sector has assumed great importance. Aviation has been facing a number of challenges in the 21st century. Today, it has become essential for all Member states, irrespective of their size or strength, to enter into global partnerships that will protect the interests of all and provide mutual benefits. The relevance and success of new and emerging technologies, particularly in the areas of air safety and security, will depend primarily on meaningful international co-operation. India is committed to furthering international co-operation, particularly through the aegis of ICAO, and we welcome all mechanisms that can facilitate mutual support and co-operation.

3. For a country of India's sub-continental size, having a population of over 1 billion and a rapidly growing economy, a thriving and efficient civil aviation sector is necessary for achieving our national policies and goals. Over 95% of tourist arrivals in India are by air and 40% of our exports and imports by value are carried by air. Our domestic and international traffic are both growing at over 8% per annum. It is our constant endeavour to increase this momentum and to achieve global standards in both air transport services and air transport infrastructure.

4. Responding to the needs of our growing economy, we have been progressively opening up the skies for international air services. Through calibrated liberalisation policies, we aim to meet the demands of international and domestic travel on the one hand and enable our own carriers to compete effectively in a growing aviation market on the other.

5. India already has an Open Sky policy for cargo, without any restrictions whatsoever. On the passenger side, in order to cater to the peak season demand of seats on international routes, we have been adopting an Open Sky policy for four to five months in a year. For the Winter 2004-05 season, an Open Sky policy has already been declared for the period November 2004-March 2005. In recent times, there has been significant growth in bilateral traffic rights with the 10 ASEAN countries, Sri Lanka, Australia and UK. Under a recent policy initiative to deal with new requests for traffic rights, all countries having Air Services Agreements with India will be permitted on reciprocal basis to operate a daily service each to any two international airports of choice in India. Acknowledging the importance of tourism in the growth of the economy, our tourist charter policy has also been significantly liberalised, both for inbound and outbound tourist charter flights.

6. It is our endeavour to create world-class aviation infrastructure in India. We are restructuring and modernising the two major gateway airports at Delhi and Mumbai through the joint venture route. We are also encouraging public-private partnership for establishing more Greenfield airports. India is committed to establish facilitation standards for passengers in line with the best international practices. India is a major air corridor between the East and the West and we have provided state-of-the-art communication, navigation, surveillance and air traffic management services at our major airports.

7. Aviation safety is a matter of utmost importance to ICAO and we are happy to confirm that India is meeting all the standards stipulated by ICAO. We are fully committed to the ICAO universal safety oversight audit programme. We expect all contracting States to accept the primacy of this audit as meeting the established international standards. Newer and more sophisticated technologies are posing a challenge. We continue to maintain that ICAO should globally coordinate the implementation of emerging technologies, especially inter-regional requirements, by conducting more workshops and training sessions for the member States, so that all States are fully geared to respond to such technologies.

8. In India, aviation security is given very high priority and is directly under Government control. We adhere to all international standards laid down for aviation security and stand fully committed to the Universal Security Audit Programme. We have a national civil aviation security training programme to train personnel for compliance with the requirements of international civil aviation standards. While we have a national contingency plan to deal with unlawful interference, each airport has its own specific contingency plan.

9. This General Assembly is being held at a time when air traffic has started showing signs of recovery after various setbacks in the last two to three years. While it is a matter of satisfaction that the downward trend in the aviation sector has been arrested, if not reversed, it is a matter of concern that operating costs for the airlines are progressively increasing. The cost of providing secure air transportation has grown enormously. Fuel prices are also consistently escalating, which directly affects the commercial viability of airline operations. The growth of traffic is congesting the available airspace and ensuring the safety of dense air traffic poses new challenges. It is in this backdrop that we are meeting and the need of hour is for all countries to come together to find practical ways and means for a coordinated global development of the aviation sector.

10. In conclusion, India would like to thank this august Assembly for the initiatives it has taken to take the aviation sector forward. Mr. President, we deeply appreciate the immense contributions you have made and the support you have given to strengthen and develop air transport during your tenure. I extend my thanks to the Assembly for the opportunity given to me to make this statement.