

Sixth Worldwide Air Transport Conference
Address by the Chairperson of the Air Transport Committee

I have the honour and the pleasure in my capacity as Chairman of the Air Transport Committee to join the President of the Council in welcoming you to Montréal and to the Sixth Worldwide Air Transport Conference.

I echo Mr. Kobeh's sentiments in suggesting that this ICAO air transport conference gives us a unique opportunity to transform the global regulatory framework. Planning the sustainability of air transport is a vast and complex undertaking that will require the combined wisdom, expertise and goodwill of everyone in this room.

By your very presence here, from 121 Member States and 27 international organizations, you show that you are committed to shaping a regulatory environment that makes it possible for us to provide safe, regular, efficient and economical air transport for years to come. This much needed modernization will also respond to the growing demands of users in a rapidly evolving global marketplace.

As a measure of its commitment to the process, ICAO prepared extensively for this high-level meeting-of-the-minds. For close to one year, it engaged in a global dialogue with the world aviation community to fully understand the key issues and concerns of States, industry and users.

In April 2012, the Organization convened an International Air Transport Symposium that explored the barriers to air transport sustainability. Out of that interactive forum emerged preliminary strategies that were tested and further developed during six regional seminars and two meetings. The sessions were intended for both States and industry and were held beginning last July in Rabat, Buenos Aires, Martinique, Senegal, Paris, Ottawa, Washington and, finally, in Hong Kong in January of this year.

Feedback from these exploratory sessions was highly substantive and enlightening. The various views and opinions expressed were instrumental in fine tuning the documents and presentations that will form the basis of our discussions this week on specific policy proposals, all designed to ensure the long-term sustainability and economic development of the global air transport system.

The final element of our preparatory work was the pre-Conference Symposium held yesterday and which many of you attended. I personally found it quite stimulating in delving into the main sustainability policy perspective of all stakeholders in the air transport chain. We wanted participants to be candid, provocative and constructive. We were well served on that score.

I take this opportunity to thank the panelists and moderators for their willingness to take us out of our comfort zone and consider new ways of looking at an aging reality. This is what the President was referring to a few moments ago when he called on us to adapt our thinking and actions to the realities of the 21st century.

There is a powerful image that comes to mind when I think of changing our point of view. When ICAO was created in 1944, what did we see on a map of the world? Geographical and political boundaries. That had been the case for centuries and we shaped our thinking around that concept of the world. When we saw our first picture of earth taken from outer space, the political boundaries had disappeared. We saw the blue planet in a totally new way. Perhaps the astronauts understood better what the American philosopher and inventor Buckminster Fuller meant when he referred to our planet as Spaceship Earth – where there are no passengers, only crew. We all have to do our share to make it work.

I am heartened by the fact that air transport has consistently demonstrated its resilience over the years, in the face of often grave and seemingly insurmountable challenges. Many of us can recall the devastating effects of the first oil shock in the mid-70s, the deep recession of the early 90's, the Asian crisis in 1997, the terrorist attacks in the U.S. on 11 September 2001, the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003, and the 2008 to 2009 world financial crisis, to name but a few.

Throughout all of these hardships, global air transport not only survived, but grew. In fact it has doubled in size every 15 years since 1977. This growth highlights how fundamental a thriving air transport sector is – not only to economic prosperity – but to economic recovery and development too.

In closing, I want to emphasize how important the outcomes of this Conference will be to the Air Transport Committee which I have the privilege to Chair. Over the coming months, our work programme will focus on ICAO's role in promoting the sustainability and economic development of air transport, in line with ICAO's recently-adopted Mission and new Strategic Objective in this area. For that, we must have access to the latest thinking and intelligence and much of that will come from the deliberations and recommendations of this Conference.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are engaged in a common venture – to provide States with timely and comprehensive policy guidance, and to encourage States to use that guidance according to their needs and circumstances on a national, bilateral, and multilateral basis.

I thank you in advance for your contribution to this effort and I wish you all a most productive and stimulating Conference !