



ICAO, IMO, and UNWTO call for urgent actions to help the aviation and tourism sector withstand COVID-19 impacts

For immediate release

Montréal, 20 March 2020 – The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Maritime Organization (IMO), and the World Health Organization (WHO) joined the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) yesterday for a virtual teleconference on COVID-19.

The meeting was introduced with priorities and highlights being outlined by Mr. Zurab Pololikashvili, UNWTO Secretary General. This was followed by remarks from senior officials from the other agencies participating, including ICAO Secretary General Dr. Fang Liu and IMO Secretary General Mr. Kitack Lim.

From an overall standpoint, a key conclusion of the ministers and senior UN officials present was that calls would need to be made urgently to governments to take immediate actions, including through financial aid packages and incentives, to help the aviation and tourism sectors withstand current COVID-19 risks and impacts.

When outlining the status of the air industry, and summarizing the actions taken to-date by ICAO, Dr. Liu underscored that even while the air transport sector can be vulnerable to many external factors beyond its control, COVID-19 was presenting States and operators with entirely new levels of systemic risk.

“We have confronted economic sustainability challenges in the past in terms of various financial crises, the 9/11 attacks, the Eyjafjallajökull volcano eruption, and indeed with earlier pandemics, but the COVID-19 consequences the air transport sector is confronted with today are truly unprecedented,” she commented.

She also stressed that commercial operators had “registered significant losses not only in specific areas of COVID-19 impact, but indeed globally given the realities of network interconnectivity and preventative actions now being carried to limit international mobility.”

Dr. Liu also highlighted that while the consequences of these impacts are being felt in key economic sectors such as tourism, cascading impacts were being felt throughout civil societies as other types of supplies and goods which we rely on in our daily lives begin to vanish from shelves as more and more international trade is curtailed.

“All of these effects deplete the society-wide sustainability benefits which air transport is relied on for, especially in developing States, and without the related revenues continuing to flow into State coffers, direct government action on the UN SDGs may likely become curtailed,” she noted.

Dr. Liu also summarized for the UN colleagues present the significant work which ICAO has been undertaking with Member States, other international organizations, and aviation industry partners.

“ICAO urges our Member States to implement public health related regulations and guidance. We also have a leading role to play in the ICAO Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation (CAPSCA) programme,” she commented.

After outlining the specific actions ICAO had undertaken since the onset of the international impacts of COVID-19, Dr. Liu concluded by highlighting that “without reliable, affordable air services, and harmonized aviation and tourism policies, the benefits of aviation and tourism simply cannot be realized. I wish to be very clear how much ICAO recognizes the importance of these dynamics to global sustainability objectives.”

The meeting also heard from the Chairs of various UNWTO Regional Commissions, featured special interventions from the Ministers of Tourism for Spain and Saudi Arabia, and welcomed responses from various industry bodies including Airports Council International (ACI) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

All industry stakeholders were unanimous in their perception that global connectivity by air is facing dire and possibly critical risks due to the threats to the economic sustainability of operators being posed by COVID-19 response protocols worldwide.

The UN agencies present agreed that a wide ranging coordination body be established to begin addressing the public-private response required to address these significant and sector-threatening consequences.



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About ICAO

A specialized agency of the United Nations, ICAO was created in 1944 to promote the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation throughout the world. It sets standards and regulations necessary for aviation safety, security, efficiency, capacity and environmental protection, amongst many other priorities. The Organization serves as the forum for cooperation in all fields of civil aviation among its 193 Member States.

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[ICAO COVID-19 online information portal](#)

[ICAO Facilitation website](#)

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