



**Opening remarks by the  
Secretary General of the  
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)  
Mr. Juan Carlos Salazar  
to the Global Webinar on the High-level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC)**

*(Virtual Event, 15 December 2021, 0800 EST)*

*Distinguished participants,*

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

1. I would like to extend to you all a very warm welcome to this global webinar on the outcomes of the ICAO High-level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC).
2. ICAO conducted this event from 12 to 22 October, well aware of where the world stood at that time with respect to the aviation recovery from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Our goal at the HLCC was to augment the recovery trends with new State commitments, and accordingly the Conference considered a broad range of issues while focusing most directly on safety and facilitation objectives.
4. The Conference also took full account of the lessons we had learned about the operational and economic impacts of COVID-19 on the aviation sector.
5. In total over 1,750 representatives from 129 countries and 38 international organizations took part in the HLCC. In particular, it benefitted from the participation of 56 Ministers and Deputy Ministers, as well as 24 heads of aviation's most prominent global bodies.
6. We saw this global high-level buy-in as a clear recognition that this pandemic is a collective challenge, requiring multilateral action to overcome, and that ICAO is the organization to lead those efforts in the aviation sector.

7. Ministers completed a comprehensive review of pandemic-driven priorities for global air transport at the HLCC, formalizing new commitments on border risk management, the facilitation of passenger flows, international cooperation, and building air transport back better for sustainability and future pandemic resilience.
8. They also addressed many other key priorities, and all were aimed at accelerating air travel, tourism, and trade recovery, and reconnecting the world.
9. The main outcome of this event was its Ministerial Declaration, which conveyed a strong political message to the international community advocating actions to support the recovery of the aviation industry.
10. Its commitments supported a multilayer risk management strategy for international aviation, promoting a harmonized and inclusive approach to facilitate safe international air travel.
11. The Ministers also recognized the need to provide economic and financial support to operators and regulators, and to better assure the mutual recognition of and accessibility to digital applications.
12. Commitments were also made to address global crisis response capability and to strengthen mechanisms for State assistance.
13. As part of the follow up to the HLCC, the ICAO Secretariat has started to identify the priorities and actions which will effectively advance the outcomes of the Conference, including its Ministerial Declaration, and recommendations stemming from the Safety and Facilitation Streams.
14. Subsequent progress will then be assessed and reported by the ICAO Council to the 41st Session of the ICAO Assembly to be held in September next year.
15. With the onset of the Omicron variant, another key priority today is to remind States of the need for scientifically-informed responses committed to in the Ministerial Declaration.
16. We cannot restore and revitalize aviation so long as governments impose border restrictions without proper justification based on data-driven decisions.
17. At the same time, many countries need both assistance and guidance to develop and update evidence-based multilayer risk management strategies for international civil aviation.

18. Additional key priorities include the establishment of faster and safer contactless travel solutions in specific travel markets. These can be realized through bilateral or multilateral arrangements, including Public Health Corridors, and support the interoperability and mutual recognition of digital solutions for health certifications, such as those achieved by using ICAO Visible Digital Seal (VDS) authentication.
19. Furthermore, we need to establish more effective frameworks among States, financial institutions, international partners, and the private sector in order to address industry and government financial viability.
20. In all of these efforts, collaboration cannot be overemphasized. That is why we are grateful to have you join us today to help pivot from the HLCC towards strengthened international frameworks and a more efficient and coordinated response to this and future crises.
21. I hope that you will all benefit from this webinar, and that it will support your efforts towards implementing the HLCC recommendations and Ministerial Declaration commitments.
22. Thank you for your attention.