



**Keynote speech by  
ICAO Secretary General  
Mr. Juan Carlos Salazar  
to the  
UNWTO 24<sup>th</sup> General Assembly**

*(Virtual event, Madrid, Spain, 30 November 2021)*

1. It is a great honour to address you today, and to be able to help set the stage for your discussions with these keynote remarks.
2. I wish to extend my deepest thanks to UNWTO Secretary General Pololikashvili for his kind invitation to address you, and at such an important crossroads for air transport and global tourism.
3. I would like to begin today by highlighting, that despite some substantial volatility over 2021, during the summer some noticeable improvements have been observed in international travel.
4. This was especially evident on short haul international routes like those you're very familiar with in Europe, but which also characterize international air transport in the Asia Pacific and the Americas and Caribbean.
5. I was just in Cancun a few days ago in fact, for an Airports Council International Assembly, and I remarked there on how seat capacity in that region has jumped by more than 14% in just the past month.
6. Similar signs are being seen all over the world, and the latest passenger trends globally are also pointing to a further increase in both domestic and international reservations during the end-of-year holiday period.
7. As these early signs of recovery begin to expand in their scope and significance, I think it's clear to all of us that the innovation and agility of the travel and tourism sectors will be put to an important test in terms of how we pivot together and build back better.

8. I would highlight here as well, that these very early stages of recovery are an especially critical moment for cooperation and multilateralism to play their role – whether to amplify and accelerate the momentum being seen among the diverse partners involve, or to forge consensus among them on where we need to go and how we’re going to get there.
  9. I think this clearly underscores how the role of UN agencies in these times will be absolutely fundamental to us achieving collective, global outcomes consistent with *Agenda 2030* and the *Common Agenda*.
  10. This explains in part why the UNWTO and ICAO are now working more closely than ever.
  11. We’ve formalized a new MOU recently addressing a comprehensive range of collaboration priorities, and which will guide us in specific recovery areas such as the modernization of the passenger experience, and the greening of travel and tourism on a comprehensive end-to-end basis.
  12. We’ll also be issuing a joint statement soon for International Civil Aviation Day on 7 December, the first joint issuance for this occasion in ICAO’s history. And that day will also mark the start of a new communications campaign we’re conducting on the theme of ‘Reconnecting the World.
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13. The Ministerial Declaration adopted at ICAO’s High-level Conference on COVID-19 one month ago clearly demonstrated the strong political commitment and resolve of States, and of all industry stakeholders, to restore aviation air connectivity safely and efficiently, and to build its resilience and sustainability.
  14. To accomplish this ICAO needs to closely oversee the safe recovery of aviation, managing a complex path back to full standards compliance and engaging with industry operators and national regulators facing unparalleled financing and resource challenges.
  15. As just underscored, we also need to assure a modernized recovery for every stage of the passenger experience, addressing both aviation security and traveler health priorities.

16. Post-pandemic travelers will be arriving at airports with clear expectations for an air travel experience which is secure, contactless, and health prioritized. We will need to work with States and suppliers to leverage new screening approaches and technologies to realize this.
17. Fortunately, the increasing digitization of these processes should also lead to greater passenger convenience and throughput at border entry and security and customs checkpoints. But they also raise cybersecurity concerns which will need to be carefully tended to.
18. The objective here is both greater public confidence in air travel and tourism, and a more efficient and comfortable overall experience for passengers, even as they are being more vigilantly protected.
19. A recent and important contribution ICAO has made to enhance passenger confidence in contactless and secure aviation processes are the new specifications for the ICAO Visible Digital Seal for encoding personal health proofs.
20. The VDS provides for mutually-recognized global trust and acceptance in these proofs and certifications, safeguarding data and privacy and greatly improving passenger confidence in international travel options.
21. Its current global roll-out is also highlighting how our passenger security, processing, and health screening objectives will become far more integrated and synergistic moving forward, and a key aspect of aviation's post-pandemic new normal.

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22. Underscoring all of our recovery efforts, of course, is the imperative for our sectors to decrease and ultimately eliminate our carbon footprints.
23. The decarbonizing of aviation has been called for very strongly of late, and by many countries - whether at the recent COP/26, G7, or G20 events, or ICAO's own High-level Conference on COVID-19.

24. This reflects the fact that the climate crisis represents one of our gravest threats. From natural disasters to economic downturn, from disease outbreaks to conflicts, global warming and its ripple effects impact everyone, everywhere, including aviation and tourism.
25. Bold action must therefore be taken now if we are to mitigate the most severe impacts, and it is clear that business as usual is not good enough.
26. I am very much supportive of Secretary General Guterres' recent calls for our sectors to be rapidly moving toward carbon neutrality. I am optimistic in reaching that goal based on the detailed Net-zero 2050 commitments now emerging from all over the air transport industry.
27. Considerable progress is already being realized by more fuel-efficient aircraft technologies, better optimized operations, Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF), and the transparent and accountable carbon offsetting being established under ICAO's CORSIA initiative.
28. ICAO has been taking stock of new innovations in aviation emissions reduction at events designed for that purpose this year and last. Based on what we're seeing, it's clear that innovation will be as critical to meeting aviation's climate objectives, as it is to our efforts to re-imagine the aircraft, or to modernize the passenger experience.
29. ICAO's key role is to understand and enable all of this innovation through effective global standardization, and to assure that all new technologies and operations are safely, securely and sustainably integrated into our global network.
30. In light of the incredible pace at which things are now advancing, we're also faced with the challenge of transforming ourselves from the ground up to make ICAO more agile, efficient, and results-based in the face of this incredible new era of imagination and invention.
31. Virtually everyone in this room today for example can one day look forward to an autonomous air taxi carrying you from an airport to a hotel or other travel destination.
32. But the path from the videos we see on social media of these amazing new aircraft, to you sitting in that seat, is one paved with detailed and inclusive research, and diligent standardization and certification procedures.

33. I'd like to highlight that vaccination is making air travel and tourism possible again. However, for countries to begin reaping the benefits of revitalized travel and tourism markets, border restrictions for doubly-vaccinated passengers need to be quickly reviewed and lifted wherever conditions permit.
34. Prior to the pandemic, some 1.4 billion tourists crossed borders every year, well over half of whom arrived at their destination by air.
35. These air travelers represent an important economic lifeline for many countries, but most especially those characterized by Least Developed, Landlocked Developing, or Small Island Developing status.
36. Together we therefore share a solemn duty to bring travelers back to their destinations and reconnect our world, so that our common targets for global sustainability can be put back on track, and so that millions of people can have their livelihoods restored.
37. In concluding today, I wish to express ICAO's deepest gratitude to the UNWTO for being such an effective partner and contributor to aviation's response and recovery efforts, including through the ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART), and at our recent High-level conference.
38. I think our Organizations have demonstrated an excellent level of solidarity and efficiency throughout these challenge. And we now have a very solid foundation and some excellent motivation to guide our future collaboration.
39. I look forward to seeing just how much progress we can achieve together in the important months ahead.
40. Thank you.