



**Opening address by the  
Secretary General of the  
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),  
Mr. Juan Carlos Salazar  
to the ICAO DRONE ENABLE 2023 Symposium**

*(ICAO HQ Montréal, 5 December 2023)*

*Good morning all,*

1. Welcome to this year's DRONE ENABLE symposium.
2. The unmanned aviation ecosystem as a whole relies heavily on infrastructure and innovative technologies.
3. That is why this year we have chosen the theme of ***Innovation and infrastructure developments supporting the future of unmanned aviation.***
4. In particular, this year's event will look at advancements that are critical to meeting the growing demand for scalable new entrants' operations, primarily in low-level airspace.
5. I am very pleased to welcome you here today, as the aim of DRONE ENABLE symposia has always been to bring together key stakeholders to learn about new developments, discuss the challenges, and inspire progress in this extraordinary part of aviation.
6. At the heart of these discussions are our *Request for Information* sessions. Covering various topics across the years, the *Request for Information* submitters help ICAO and the global community fully understand the nuances and interdisciplinarity of unmanned aviation.
7. These submissions are also used to inform the updating of the "*Unmanned Aircraft Systems Traffic Management– Common Framework with Core Principles for Global Harmonization*".

8. Indeed, thanks to the efforts and commitment of the Request for Information submitters, the ICAO Unmanned Aircraft Systems Advisory Group has drafted four editions of this Framework, thereby serving States with the provision of a framework and core capabilities of a “typical” system.
9. This year, the ICAO Secretariat has received 47 Request for Information submissions.
10. Each one was thoroughly reviewed and considered by the Advisory Group, and 16 were selected to be presented during the event.
11. I am particularly excited that one of the Request for Information topics this year addresses the important question of which solutions are needed, or indeed being developed, to address requirements for Communications, Navigation, Surveillance and Spectrum, or CNS & S, in low-level airspace.
12. CNS & S capabilities as they stand today might not be able to accommodate the needs where new types of operations are expected to be conducted, in particular for low level and rural areas.
13. This means that as new entrants bring innovative types of operations, existing CNS & S capabilities and infrastructure have to be adapted for a new performance-driven approach.
14. I am also glad that a second Request for Information topic this year focusses on identifying those critical elements of Advanced Air Mobility, or AAM, that require global interoperability and harmonization.
15. This is in direct support of a special role of this year’s DRONE ENABLE event, namely to support our preparations for the First ICAO AAM Symposium, which will be held here in Montréal in September next year.
16. I would like to emphasize that ICAO has heard and listened to calls from States, voiced over the years at Assemblies and Divisional type meetings, to work on Unmanned Aircraft System, or UAS, and AAM-related considerations.

17. I can assure you that supporting the exploration of these innovative areas of aviation is the first priority for ICAO that I would like to highlight today, as is ensuring that all stakeholders are encouraged to fully participate and contribute to this work.
18. Indeed, the 41st Session of the ICAO Assembly recognized that the rapidly evolving AAM ecosystem calls for work to be undertaken by ICAO.
19. The Assembly also recognized the potential need for a globally harmonized operational and regulatory framework and guidance.
20. It agreed that ICAO's leadership role is essential to achieving this harmonization, and it expressed support for the establishment of an expert group that would develop a holistic vision and framework and advise ICAO on activities in this area.
21. It is worth noting that, on the basis of the call for action from ICAO's last Assembly, the Air Navigation Commission established the AAM Study Group, which will hold its second meeting next week.
22. AAM and new entrants have also been identified by the Council as one of ICAO's seven priority focus areas for this triennium. You will hear about developments in this area during a dedicated session on day 3.
23. UAS are an important subset of the future AAM ecosystem, and UAS Traffic Management, or UTM, is a crucial enabler this ecosystem.
24. Over the coming three days you will be provided with updates on UTM developments and services, Remote ID, safety and security aspects, as well as long-distance beyond visual line of sight operations, or BVLOS.
25. Scalable BVLOS operations, especially for large distances, will pave the way for more complex future AAM applications, including cargo, medical and eventually passenger carriage, thereby contributing to States' economic growth and broader progress towards global sustainable development goals.

26. In several States, these operations are in fact already deployed to support humanitarian assistance and aid, crisis management, and other social benefits.
27. The fact that a significant body of experience and expertise already exists points to the reason why your active participation through ICAO, as representatives of governments, industry, academia, and related international organizations, is essential to expand and spread the opportunities, and transform potential into reality.
28. Of course, turning opportunities into reality requires not only practical trials but also robust standards and regulations that underpin safety and efficiency, while accommodating and in fact encouraging innovation.
29. This is a second priority for ICAO that I would like to reinforce. Our prioritization of this issue is reflected in our efforts to enhance and accelerate our development of Standard and Recommended Practices, or SARPs, Procedures for Air Navigation, and guidance for States in this area.
30. On this point, I would like to highlight that the nature of operations by new entrants may lead ICAO and its Member States to continue considering performance-based regulations, when appropriate.
31. This change translates directly into a transformation of aviation towards a more digital environment, based on connectivity and information-centric capabilities and services.
32. Information sharing is also the key to enabling meaningful UTM capabilities, and the safe and efficient full integration of both conventional and non-conventional aircraft operations.
33. Furthermore, digital systems provide for a much higher degree of automation and autonomy, which will be essential to accommodate the forecasted increase of UAS operations, and which accordingly will be one of the fundamental building blocks of AAM.
34. Supporting this transformation, critical work has been conducted on remotely piloted aircraft systems SARPs.

35. ICAO's Remotely Piloted Aircraft System Panel has delivered Annex 6, Part IV. It recently underwent final review by the Air Navigation Commission, and is envisaged for applicability on 26 November 2026.
36. On this note, ensuring our standard-setting keeps pace with your needs and expertise is the third priority I would like to highlight today. In this regard I want to highlight an ongoing ICAO Transformational Objective project to review and enhance the ICAO SARPs development process, and also the implementation of ICAO's direct submission process related to the development of ICAO SARPs and PANS under the Strategic Objectives of Safety and Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency.
37. Let me underscore that in such a complex area of aviation, given its interconnectivity with almost all ICAO strategic objectives, and in light of its potential impact on all the elements of conventional aviation, this will require a particularly high level of streamlining and exchange of ideas.
38. In concluding now, I am indeed convinced that the ideas generated during this Symposium will play a key role in shaping this very promising future. The developments here hold the promise of being useful not only for unmanned aviation, but also aviation as a whole. In this regard, I invite you to participate in the upcoming 2024 ICAO Innovation Fair, with the theme "Digital Aviation: the Future is Now", to be held on 12 - 14 March 2024, here in Montreal.
39. I would like to encourage you to lead the way in facilitating this transformation and the introduction of innovative mechanisms that it requires, and I wish you excellent discussions at this symposium.
40. Thank you.