



**Address by the
Secretary General of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Juan Carlos Salazar
to the North Bund Forum, China**

(Virtual message – 4 November 2021)

1. It's my very great honour to help set the stage for the discussions and the progress to be achieved at this first-ever North Bund Forum.
2. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Municipal Government of Shanghai, and the Ministry of Transport of China, for inviting me to address the major challenges encountered by international civil aviation amid the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. It will also be my great pleasure to update you on how ICAO, Member States and industry have been working together for the safe, efficient and environmentally sustainable recovery of aviation, which has now already begun.

Impact of pandemic on civil aviation globally and in Asia/Pacific

4. The COVID-19 pandemic has been far more than a health crisis, and its restrictions on international mobility have had devastating impacts on the aviation sector.
5. 2020 witnessed the worst declines in civil aviation in history, with passenger levels falling back to 2003 levels, and airline and industry losses totaling close to half-a-Trillion dollars.
6. The sector still faces significant hardships overall, and the need remains for determined public financial support, for both operators and regulators, but we are also now beginning to see the effects of the massive global vaccination initiative, and signs of more steady and sustainable recovery.

7. The Asia/Pacific region has been leading that recovery in many respects, largely on account of domestic market resurgence in China which returned to pre-pandemic levels by the end of last year.
8. South East Asian travel markets were hardest hit by far, and they are still facing seat capacities two thirds lower than where pre-pandemic levels were at. But at the same time, in just the month of September, it saw close to a 30% increase in seats offered by carriers, and similar signs of robust recovery are now being seen in other global markets.
9. Air Cargo has been an exception to typical pandemic trends since the onset of this crisis, due mainly to the surge seen in e-commerce as consumers became locked down and retail activity evolved to digital options.
10. Precipitous air freight drops were encountered at the very onset of the pandemic, but as of September of this year the air cargo volumes for all main global trade corridors presently stand above pre-pandemic levels.
11. North Pacific and Middle East-Asia routes are showing the most profound of these increases, and overall, air cargo tonne kilometres now stand at 8% higher globally than pre-crisis levels.

ICAO's work since the beginning of the global pandemic

12. From the onset of the crisis, ICAO has been striving to bring countries and industry together and assure a robust global response for the restart and recovery of civil aviation.
13. Through the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce (CART), we have accordingly been issuing wide-ranging recommendations and guidance promoting globally and regionally harmonized response and recovery measures.
14. Among these recommendations, one in particular encourages States to grant extra-bilateral traffic rights, specifically 7th freedom rights, to all-cargo flight operations. This facilitated the rapid transport of vaccines and medical supplies, in addition to perishable and commercial goods which were increasingly in short supply in many parts of the world.

15. Another CART recommendation aimed to reduce both COVID-19 contamination risk to supply chain workers, and our environmental footprint.
16. ICAO has also been addressing associated priorities by collaborating with other UN agencies, including the United National Economic and Social Commission for the Asia-Pacific, to help States implement new and free-of-charge technical specifications for contactless digital information exchange.
17. These innovations have delivered immediate policy and technological benefits to States and supply chains, and they will also facilitate trade over the longer-term to help drive the economic recovery.
18. The ability of the aviation and shipping sectors to deliver essential goods globally has become even more critical during the pandemic, and they will remain vital as we continue to recover.
19. ICAO and other United Nations organizations, including the International Maritime Organization, have accordingly released a series of joint statements since the onset of COVID-19 to help assure continued operational efficiency, vaccine and medical supply distribution, and the prioritization of vaccination for essential transport personnel.

HLCC

20. To further strengthen the collaboration we were establishing among States, and between sectors, ICAO recently concluded its High-Level Conference on COVID-19.
21. State Ministers and Deputy Ministers joined the heads of [38] international organizations at this event to conduct a comprehensive review of pandemic-driven priorities for global air transport.
22. They also formalized new commitments on border risk management and vaccination approaches, and to build air transport back better to address its future environmental and operational sustainability – especially with respect to innovation and future pandemic resilience.

23. Many other key priorities were also addressed during this intensive nine-day round of multilateralism, and all were aimed at accelerating air tourism and trade recovery and reconnecting the world.
24. The Ministerial Declaration which resulted from this Conference accordingly recognizes the severity of the COVID-19 crisis for civil aviation, its cascading impacts on global supply chains, and the many national and regional economies which rely so significantly on international flights for tourism and trade.
25. To strengthen global public confidence in air travel, the HLCC participants emphasized in their Declaration that while vaccination should not be a precondition for travel, it is highly desirable that it be used to facilitate increased international mobility.
26. Countries also agreed to work with ICAO and other stakeholders to ensure the interoperability and accessibility of secure applications to validate pandemic-related testing, vaccination, and recovery certification.
27. Finally, among its many further calls to action, the Conference underscored the collective engagement of States and industry to strengthen the international framework for a coordinated and streamlined response to future crises, and to revitalize cross-sectoral cooperation for more prompt and coordinated crisis management.

Conclusion

28. Collective efforts, and the harmonization of measures globally and regionally, will continue to be the key to the safe, efficient and environmentally sustainable resumption of aviation, and the full restoration of passenger and shipper confidence.
29. This illustrates why this North Bund Forum is taking place at such a critical moment for civil aviation, and for shipping industries globally.

30. We must continue to work very closely together at the multilateral level to revitalize international exchanges and cooperation, and enhance the development of global tourism and trade to drive increased prosperity for all.
31. We also face a monumental challenge in building aviation back better such that future traffic growth doesn't detrimentally impact our efforts to reduce and eliminate air transport emissions, and many related solutions are being innovated in this region today, demonstrating your leadership in the de-carbonization of aviation and the response to the climate crisis.
32. In concluding today, I therefore wish to pledge to you that ICAO will assure more responsive and effective teamwork with Member States, industry, and international partnering organizations going forward, in order to successfully lead the global air transport community in reuniting people, societies, and economies again.
33. Reconnecting the world is a tremendous challenge and a solemn responsibility, but I am more reassured than ever today that we have the solidarity and capacity to assure our success, and that global recovery could accelerate and be realized more quickly than many now anticipate.
34. Asia and Pacific States have a key role to play in these efforts, and I'm greatly encouraged to see you taking action on these issues here today at this inaugural North Bund Forum.
35. Thank you.