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**Keynote remarks
by the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
to the 5th World Aviation Conference**

(Virtual event, Incheon, South Korea, 29 March 2021)

Dear participants in the 5th World Aviation Conference,

Please let me thank Mr. Kyung Wook Kim, President of the Incheon International Airport Corporation, for the very kind invitation to provide these keynote remarks today to this 5th World Aviation Conference (WAC).

I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, Mr. Chang Heum Byeon, and the Government of the Republic of Korea for hosting this event.

I also wish to acknowledge our former Representative of Korea, Ambassador Yun Je Lee, whose contributions and participations in various Committees have greatly assisted the deliberations of the ICAO Council

Allow me to congratulate the entire Incheon team on the 20th Anniversary of this world-renowned facility.

I would be remiss to begin my address today without mentioning the implications of COVID-19 on air transport.

The latest ICAO Economic Impact Analysis of COVID-19 on Civil Aviation reveals that global seat capacity offered by airlines in 2020 closed out at 50 per cent down from 2019 levels, and the number of passengers fell by 60 per cent or 2.7 billion, compared to 4.5 billion in 2019.

This brings passenger traffic back to 2003 levels.

Entering into 2021, virus resurgence and related shutdowns put a halt to air travel recovery globally. February marked another month of deterioration in air traffic across all regions, and domestic travel further decreased.

Here in the Asia-Pacific region, overall capacity in 2020 was reduced by 45 per cent, and passenger numbers dropped by 55 per cent. International and domestic traffic, meanwhile, declined by 80 per cent and 45 per cent respectively.

The precipitous decline in air traffic has created severe liquidity strains for all aviation stakeholders. Airlines, airports, air navigation service providers (ANSPs), and aerospace manufacturers have all faced tremendous challenges, as have others throughout the air transport value chain.

Since the onset of the COVID-19 outbreak, the aviation industry has taken a series of “self-help” steps, both financial and operational, to control costs, maximize liquidity, and increase operational efficiency.

But it is equally important that States take appropriate actions to stabilize and support their beleaguered aviation industry, whether through direct or indirect financial support, regulatory relief, or operational flexibilities.

Importantly, there is no ‘one-size fits-all’ solution where financial support is concerned. Different measures come with varying implications and constraints, and governments should always be seen as the last resort after aviation companies have exhausted all other options for relief or recapitalization.

To help States and industry cope with the economic fallout of the pandemic, ICAO has developed new Guidance on Economic and Financial Measures. This document summarizes a range of possible measures that can be explored by States and companies, both to address immediate needs and strengthen the sector’s resilience to future crises.

The post-pandemic era will undoubtedly bring challenges alongside uptakes in air traffic. It is therefore necessary to ensure that the challenges we can reasonably anticipate now are addressed and kept in scope.

Looking ahead, the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) has identified three key areas which will require the continued coordination and commitments of States, UN agencies, international and regional organizations, and industry.

The first of these is the planning of national risk management strategies to gradually reduce reliance on public health measures and reactivate economic activity.

These so-called “exit strategies” will require national decision-makers to focus on aviation’s longstanding role as an enabler and multiplier of economic recovery and growth.

The second area concerns the potentially profound implications of COVID-19 on traditional air transport, whether in terms of its business models or operations.

The ‘new normal’ post-pandemic will likely see new passenger priorities solidifying in terms of personal health and the carbon footprint of their flights, and these customer preferences will require new types of operations, fleet management, and pricing approaches.

We also do not know whether long-haul business travel will ever recover to what it was pre-pandemic, before the widespread use of virtual meeting platforms, but most expect that this economic backbone for many airlines will no longer be able to fulfill that role.

And in addition to all of these factors, we’re undergoing a digital transformation of the sector characterized by new challenges in terms of both innovation and integration, and this will only accelerate as we seek to address passenger screening, unmanned aviation, and many other expectations.

The third key area the Council's task force has identified concerns the priority for us to learn together from COVID-19 to improve overall air transport crisis preparedness, enhance economic and environmental sustainability, and enable smarter operations.

Building a more resilient international civil aviation system will require intra- and cross-sectoral cooperation and alignment, while as usual accounting for the sovereignty and authority of States and their varying capacities to meet operational, technological, and regulatory requirements.

To help countries explore the specifics of these and other challenges, the Council has decided to convene a High-Level Conference on COVID-19 this coming October.

The Conference will consider short- and long-term implications engendered by the crisis, proposals for States to use in tackling safety, operational and economic challenges, and streamlined policy responses to address post-pandemic priorities in aviation.

It will also provide an important opportunity to share experiences among States and industry, and to strengthen and demonstrate multilateral cooperation while augmenting States' individual and collective engagements.

Some additional priorities we must pay very careful attention to concerns the need for greater levels of membership and cooperation under the ICAO CAPSCA framework for infectious disease preparedness, the continuing need of pilots and other skilled personnel to meet their licensing and accreditation requirements, and the potential safety risks we may face as airline, airport, ANSP and other businesses restart major operations in conditions of economic hardship.

Before concluding, I wish to recall that just last week the ICAO Council concluded its 222nd Session, where the CART Phase III global amendments were endorsed and significant progress also continued in areas concerning CO₂ aviation emissions reduction, the integration of remotely-piloted aircraft systems into the international air transport regulatory framework, a new structure for ICAO Cybersecurity activities, and the adoption of a new Declaration on gender equality, among others.

Some high-level diplomatic matters relating to international airspace restrictions were also resolved.

I bring up these updates to help remind us that, even as the pandemic has brought much of air transport to a halt, the business of international aviation still continues, and in a manner which is bringing our community together as never before at the global and regional levels.

I wish to commend the Republic of Korea and its fellow Asia-Pacific States for their resilience and responsiveness in the face of the pandemic, and ask you to build on the strengths we have established to confront the pandemic together to make air transport in this region even safer, more integrated, and more sustainable than ever before.

I also wish to reassure you that when the vaccines have done their work and the shadow of COVID-19 has lifted, people everywhere will take to the skies again to explore and to learn and to trade, via the international connections by which modern civilian aircraft bring our peoples and cultures uniquely together.