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**Keynote remarks  
by the Council President of the  
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)  
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,  
to the HERMES Latin America/COVID virtual event**

*(Virtual event, Bogota, Colombia, 19 April 2021)*

I wish to thank Dr. Kostas Iatrou for the very kind invitation to join you today, and for the opportunity to help set the stage for the forthcoming discussions.

The latest ICAO Economic Impact Analysis of COVID-19 on Civil Aviation reveals that we are back to 2003 levels in terms of global seat capacity. Presently ICAO is projecting an overall global reduction in passengers of between forty-one and fifty percent for 2021, compared to the sixty per cent reduction we monitored for 2020.

In South America, current weekly aircraft movements are mirroring the global trends, and presently stand at roughly sixty percent of this Region's pre-pandemic levels.

I wish to commend Latin American States for their resilience and responsiveness in the face of the pandemic. In particular, I would like to recall the new regional air cargo liberalization agreement to bolster vaccine transport and long-term recovery across Latin America developed by LACAC and supported by ICAO's regional offices for the Americas – SAM and NACC. The agreement establishes expanded “seventh freedom” traffic rights, allowing airlines from one LACAC State to provide all-cargo services between two other signatory States without restrictions on routes and capacity. This will not only help increase efficiency of vaccine distribution but in the longer term should enable air cargo to play an even greater role in regional economic recovery and development.

The significant downturns still being withstood in global and regional air travel continue to present severe liquidity strains to companies and suppliers, and across the full extent of the air transport and tourism value chains.

We therefore should expect to encounter a range of challenges as air travel begins its return to normal, and the ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) has been proactively considering these challenges.

In fact just last month, the Council adopted new ‘Phase III’ amendments to the CART's Take-off Guidelines and Recommendations, which you will recall were originally issued in June 2020.

Following the emergence of newest virus variants, the vaccine rollouts, and other innovations to battle COVID-19, this latest Phase of the CART's guidance and recommendations has targeted specific issues relating to States' multilayer risk management strategies.

The latest package of CART recommendations and guidance therefore actively supports the creation of public health travel corridors, promotes safe and efficient global vaccine distribution and the facilitation of multilateral all-cargo air services, and encourages standardized COVID-19 testing certificates for secure international use.

The CART recommendations also include updated air crew vaccination considerations, safety priorities relating to sectoral recovery, and an encouragement for national civil aviation and transport officials to advocate more vigorously for air transport public health and economic priorities.

Taken together, the latest Phase III adjustments have been strategized under three key areas of priority.

The first of these is the establishment of national and regional risk management strategies to gradually open air routes based on mutually-recognized public health measures.

Success here will largely depend on national decision-makers taking fuller account of air transport's role as an enabler and multiplier of economic resilience and recovery. To that end, we should recall CART Phase III *Recommendation 20*, which calls for Member States to ensure that ICAO's CART guidance is taken into consideration by the wider State administration and inform decision-making processes on national recovery planning.

The second area of CART priority concerns the possibly profound long-term implications for traditional air transport business models and operations post pandemic.

The accelerating digitization of the sector will be a key factor here, but just as important will be the higher passenger expectations for healthier and more sustainable travel options.

These transformations could lead to new types of air travel products and pricing, and new approaches to network and fleet management, with cascading implications for travel and tourism markets and suppliers.

The third key area of CART priority concerns the need for us to continue to effectively coordinate, share information, and learn together from COVID-19.

All of these activities are presently improving overall air transport crisis preparedness, and as we work together on them we are helping to assure the sector's future economic resilience and environmental sustainability, ultimately enabling more efficient operations.

ICAO and its Member States clearly recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health crisis – it is also an economic and financial crisis presenting governments with very difficult trade-offs in terms of the health, economic, and social priorities concerned.

While public health is, and must remain, the overriding priority for civil societies, the critical role played by air transport in crisis response and recovery must not be under-estimated.

Global supply chains, emergency and humanitarian responses, and the swift distribution of vaccines all strongly rely on the safe and reliable air services which we all work to help realize.

Beyond that, seamless air connectivity permitting the safe and efficient movement of people, goods and services also has far-reaching cross-cutting impacts on other industry sectors, and therefore on overall national and regional economic growth and prosperity.

These issues and others will be at the forefront of discussions at the High-Level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC) which ICAO has now scheduled for this October.

Our goal with this event will be to generate the political will needed to confront COVID-19 through effective multilateral action, and to establish formal commitments supporting the safe and efficient recovery of civil aviation, and its increased long-term resilience and sustainability.

Some additional priorities we must pay very careful attention to going forward concern the need for greater levels of membership and cooperation under the ICAO CAPSCA framework for infectious disease preparedness; the continuing need for 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.

Over half a million passengers are still taking to South America's skies each week, and our core commitments in support of civil aviation safety, efficiency, and security cannot waiver.

*Ladies and gentlemen,*

Last month the ICAO Council concluded its 222<sup>nd</sup> Session, where the CART Phase III global amendments were endorsed and significant progress also continued in areas concerning CORSIA and aviation offsetting, 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, and of course a new ICAO Secretary General, Mr. Juan Carlos Salazar of Colombia, was appointed to help lead ICAO and aviation into an innovative and more sustainable post-pandemic era.

I mention 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 both global and regional levels.

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 unique international connections by which civil aviation brings so many peoples and cultures together.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you a very engaging and productive event.