



**Opening address by  
the President of the Council of the  
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),  
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,  
to the Opening of the  
41st Session of the ICAO Assembly**

*(ICAO HQ, Montréal, 27 September 2022)*

It is my great honour and privilege to declare open this 41st Session of the ICAO Assembly.

On behalf of the ICAO Council and of the ICAO Secretary General Mr. Juan Carlos Salazar, I wish to welcome the many Honourable Ministers and delegates participating in this Assembly. I also wish to extend a very warm welcome to our three distinguished guests:

Madame. Valérie Plante, Mayor of Montréal;

Ms. Sylvie Barcelo, Deputy Minister of International Relations and La Francophonie du Québec;

And the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of Canada.

It is also my honour to welcome here today the representatives of UN sister organizations, regional aviation Commissions, aviation industry organizations, non-governmental organizations, and of many other entities from around the world with a vested interest in our sector. It gives me, the Council, and the ICAO Secretariat, great pleasure to see so many of you participating today in person, notwithstanding the first-ever opportunity also to participate virtually in an ICAO Assembly.

For almost 120 years, aviation has harnessed innovation and a bold spirit of adventure. And in its 78 year history, ICAO has played a fundamental role in promoting the safe, secure and sustainable development of international air transport which, in turn, has been a driver of the social, economic and cultural development of countries worldwide through mobility and connectivity. In the spirit of our mission, when we were confronted as a community with the global COVID-19 pandemic, ICAO reacted with steadfast determination and resolve in supporting international air transport to face the toughest challenge in its history for a quick restart and resilient recovery. Each and every one of you in this Hall is familiar with the role played by the ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART).

Three separate Phases of response and recovery guidance were issued through a collaborative framework involving governments, industry, regional aviation bodies, and sister UN agencies such as the World Health and World Tourism Organizations.

The results delivered by this process, coordinated and monitored by the ICAO Secretariat and facilitated by its seven Regional Offices, have played a key part in bringing air transport back to the almost full capacity we are now seeing in many regions.

It is therefore critical at this point that we continue to be guided by the many lessons learned throughout the past two and a half years, and to keep building on the outcomes of ICAO's High Level Conference on COVID-19 as outlined by the Ministerial Declaration adopted by the Conference.

This insight must inform the many decisions to be made here concerning the resilience of air transport in the coming decades. Just because this latest one is now waning, we cannot become complacent about the risk of future pandemics.

While the restart of aviation has been abrupt in recent months, many of our current challenges are ultimately due to stronger than anticipated demand.

This illustrates that the pandemic has had little long-term impact on the desire of world populations and businesses to travel and connect internationally. Greater success and prosperity are on the horizon as we continue to adapt and reconnect the world. Encouragingly, our latest analyses reveal that air transport recovery is fast-approaching pre-pandemic levels.

This makes clear that the outcomes of this Assembly will be crucial to augmenting current efforts, in addition to assuring that ICAO itself is better positioned to play its part.

As we work through the aftermath of COVID-19, we can all take pride in the fact that aviation played such a key role in how the world responded to the threat.

From our perspective, the ICAO Council and the ICAO Secretariat have made every effort to ensure that the three pillars of our activities - standard setting, oversight and implementation support – would continue without disruption and that ICAO's strategic objectives would be pursued successfully.

Returning to aviation recovery, we must acknowledge the efforts which led to accident and incident levels remaining consistent throughout this past triennium. Just a few months ago, ICAO issued its latest safety report highlighting that the accident rate in 2021 fell just below 2 accidents per million departures.

Strategic coordination and leadership certainly played a part in this success, but ultimately it was due to the agility and professionalism of thousands of dedicated men and women, to the monitoring adaptation of our safety and security audit programmes, and most of all to that core willingness on behalf of all aviation stakeholders to work as a cohesive and effective team.

As labour markets globally begin to stabilize, and government and operator capabilities become more fully restored, I have complete confidence that overall system capacity and convenience will quickly follow.

At the same time, an even more urgent global challenge requires just as strong and unified a response from international aviation.

I am speaking of course about climate change, and the need to quickly reduce, and ultimately eliminate, CO<sub>2</sub> and other greenhouse gas emissions produced by commercial and general aviation.

Industry stakeholders have already answered this urgent call with a concrete commitment to Net-Zero air transport by 2050.

This Assembly will be considering the adoption of a similar target. There is a clear proposal by the Council which reflects the excellent compromise reached after the High Level Meeting on a Long Term Aspirational Goal for international aviation held last July.

I urge all States to come together and agree at this Assembly to a Net-Zero target, so that industry can pursue the very spirit of innovation and adventure that has characterized aviation throughout its long history. This is now more necessary than ever to achieve this ambitious goal, within a harmonized global legal and policy framework that is both supportive and dependable.

As has been the case with aviation safety, security, and efficiency, ICAO has realized significant progress in the environmental domain over the last triennium, despite the pandemic and its impacts.

As part of this work, we saw the adoption of the much-awaited criteria for sustainable aviation fuels (SAF) which will be part of its global offsetting framework.

That final destination, however, is still reliant on the separate progress being made in achieving sufficient supplies of renewable energy and new storage technologies that larger aircraft can safely operate with.

Innovation in these areas is still accelerating, however, and at a remarkable and unprecedented pace.

I am very confident that we will soon have the technologies and solutions we need to achieve Net Zero aviation, and even sooner than the 2050 targets now under discussion.

As highlighted by our recent High-level Meeting which discussed the long-term emissions goal, States must also recognize through their decisions here that this ambitious objective must be supported by ambitious means for its implementation, including through required financing and investments.

Member States and stakeholders need to work together on a robust capacity-building programme for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction measures, taking full advantage of the ICAO ACT-SAF programme for Sustainable Aviation Fuels.

Another priority is the need to assure we build aviation back better to be more resilient to future crises.

This engages key security and facilitation objectives relating to a fully digitized and contactless passenger experience, and digital health proofs which are globally interoperable.

Countries have come closer together, in greatly improving the links between civil aviation and public health authorities.

We must assure that we continue to build on this momentum.

It's also clear that in a complex and rapidly evolving aviation environment, the new normal will need a modernized ICAO.

In this regard, I wish to highlight the incredible role played by the Council, in performing insightful analysis and taking bold decisions towards a modernized Organization. Let me also recognize the tremendous efforts of the Secretariat despite the working constraints imposed by the pandemic.

The Council and Secretary General Salazar have launched the transformation of this agency so that it becomes more efficient, agile and cost-effective.

The specifics of this transformative vision are fully detailed and formalized in ICAO's 2023-2025 Business Plan, as international standards setters, we play a key role in enabling new technologies and in strategizing global collaboration and targets to realize evolutionary changes in civil aviation.

The key importance of implementation support in everything we have accomplished, and are attempting to accomplish, in global aviation, cannot be over emphasized.

From the iPacks we innovated during COVID-19, to achieving everything else now ahead of us, the principles enshrined in our No Country Left Behind objectives must continue to assure that all States advance together, and not just the most able.

We have therefore taken recent and essential steps to rationalize ICAO's Technical Cooperation and Assistance programmes. The expected outcome is a needs-based capacity-building approach, supported by increased digitization, data-based decision-making, intensified partnerships, and new approaches to how we design and deliver assistance to countries.

Additional work by the Council and Secretariat has established a much more robust Ethical foundation for this Organization and a comprehensive Enterprise Risk management framework.

The Council has also reorganized its committee and governance approach, and made its overall processes and working methods more engaging, transparent, and efficient. Council meetings are now accessible through streaming on ICAO-TV and Council decisions are publicly available on the ICAO website.

In the same spirit of transparency, I would recommend that the Executive Committee at this Assembly hold its meetings openly and publicly.

Ladies and gentlemen, this past triennium our aviation community was heavily shaken by the PS752 tragedy. Our thoughts go with the family of the victims who have suffered terrible losses. This accident has pushed Member States to double their efforts to enhance safety over and around conflict zones. In this regard, I wish to thank Canada for its leadership in launching and supporting the Safer Skies initiative.

Finally, as I mentioned earlier, the Council that you elected three years ago will conclude its mandate with this Assembly. Without a doubt, it has been one of the most difficult trienniums in ICAO's history. A triennium that in its final session saw the Council hold difficult and unprecedented discussions on the aviation-related consequences of the situation in Ukraine.

In concluding, I wish to thank each Council Representative for the excellent cooperation during the triennium. Diplomacy and dedication have been exemplary. This Council has been a true example of multilateralism and, as its President, I stand before you both proud and appreciative of the level of commitment and dedication of each of its members.

I wish you all productive and engaging discussions as we begin addressing aviation priorities at this 41st ICAO Assembly.

May our deliberations be guided by the same spirit of consensus and cooperation that is enshrined in the Chicago Convention.

Thank you.