



**Keynote address by
the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
to the DGCA-MID/7 meeting**

(Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, 19 May 2024)

*Your Excellencies,
Your Excellency Abdulaziz Abdullah Al-Duailej, President General Authority of Civil Aviation,
Distinguished Directors General of Civil Aviation,
Distinguished participants,*

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for hosting this 7th MID DGCA meeting here today in the magnificent city of Riyadh and, of course, to the MID Regional Office for preparing this meeting.

Saudi Arabia is leading an incredible civil aviation development process.

This is evident through the Saudi Vision 2030, which will not only shape aviation but also rely on air transport to deliver great achievements. In this framework, the organization of the 3rd Future Aviation Forum that will start tomorrow morning is another important milestone.

As you all know, this year we celebrate the 80th anniversary of the adoption of the Chicago Convention and of the establishment of ICAO.

The celebration of the 80th anniversary will give each of us the opportunity to acknowledge the achievements of international civil aviation over the past eight decades and to reflect on how it should evolve in the future.

To guide your discussions during this meeting today, I wish to share some perspectives and reflect on the priorities resulting from our recent work at ICAO.

Preserving the high levels of safety and security requires a rigorous, systematic, and proactive approach.

ICAO encourages States to collaborate and optimize the use of aviation safety and security resources through the regional coordination mechanisms we facilitate.

Capacity building, both globally and in each Region, is a central priority for ICAO. It is key to achieving the objectives of ICAO's Global Aviation Safety Plan (GASP) and Global Air Navigation Plan (GANP), both of which were endorsed by the 41st ICAO Assembly. This endorsement will help ICAO

bring the aviation community together towards common targets and pathways to achieve a safe, secure, high-performing, and interoperable global air transport system.

I must emphasize the importance of having national development plans that meaningfully incorporate aviation development priorities. National aviation planning must be closely aligned with ICAO's Standards and Recommended Practices and structured on the basis of the targets and frameworks established in our Global Plans.

Regarding security, a revised version of ICAO's Global Aviation Security Plan and Roadmap has been circulated to States for comment, and will be considered by the Council during its current Session.

Regional aviation safety organizations and accident investigation bodies should be better supported through more sustainable funding and legal frameworks. The region's ambitious efforts to operationalize the MENA RSOO are exceptionally important, and I commend Saudi Arabia's Host State contribution and the commitment of other member States who signed the MOU. I was pleased to be present at the signing ceremony a few months ago. Now we are eager to see the official launch of the RSOO. I am also pleased to note that the MENA Accident Investigation Regional Coordination Mechanism has been established and operational since 2022.

Moving on to sustainable development, I congratulate this region for the initiative to develop the MID Region Air Transport Strategic Plan 2025-2040, which will be presented at this meeting.

I would be remiss if I would not commend you for the support to the landmark adoption of a long-term global aspirational goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050, known as the LTAG. International civil aviation has initiated its route towards decarbonization, with sustainability as an uncompromisable factor in air transport development.

In this regard, I must also highlight the excellent work of Saudi Arabia under the Saudi Green Initiative to address the climate change challenge and promote sustainability. The ambitious environmental targets laid out in this initiative are a testament to Saudi Arabia's strong commitment to this global issue.

While urgently responding to the priorities set by the LTAG, we are especially focused on making Sustainable Aviation Fuels (SAF) and Low Carbon Aviation Fuels both affordable and accessible, as they can provide over half of the needed CO₂ emission reductions. In this regard, I also wish to thank you for your support at the Third ICAO Conference on Aviation and Alternative Fuels (CAAF/3) in Dubai last November, whose outcome was the adoption of a Global Framework and a global target of a 5% reduction in CO₂ emissions by 2030.

ICAO is now working on the development of a road map that will guide ICAO and representatives of Member States, to implement the global framework. Part of this road map is related to the operationalization of the Finvest Hub, which aims to facilitate access to investment capacities and funding from financial institutions. I would like to highlight that it places a special emphasis on supporting developing countries and states with specific needs.

I am pleased to share that 150 States and organizations are now part of ICAO's Assistance, Capacity Building, and Training programme for SAF, known as ACT-SAF, which provides training, feasibility studies, support for SAF certification and policy development, and implementation of specific SAF projects for States.

The year 2024 also marks the start of the first phase of the ICAO Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA), with 126 volunteer States. This is an important

milestone in our decarbonization efforts, particularly while we bridge the technological and operational gaps.

ICAO is pairing sustainable development with capacity building and implementation support, creating a virtuous loop. The importance of these efforts to member States was demonstrated by their strong support for ICAO's new Implementation Support Policy. They further acknowledged the value-added aspects of ICAO's technical cooperation and assistance resources, as well as its portfolio of products and services to support the recovery, resilience, and sustainable development of international aviation.

ICAO is also updating the portfolio of products and services on a continuous basis, in line with identified State needs. Whether it be training, implementation packages (iPacks), or customized implementation support projects, we are ensuring that States in the Middle East Region and globally have suitable options to support their capacity development and implementation needs.

Looking to the near future, I wish to underline that one the biggest challenges faced by ICAO is to keep pace with the speed of technological innovation.

For this reason, ICAO has embarked on a process of modernization that is related to the overall organization, from the functioning of the governing body, i.e. the Council, its Secretariat, with the implementation of the Transformational Objective under the leadership of the Secretary General, including the standard-setting process so important to enhancing the Organization's responsiveness and relevance in this fast-changing environment. As part of this process, there is also a closer relationship with the aviation industry at the strategic level, between the Council and Industry leaders.

The establishment of an Industry Consultative Forum has been very crucial to identify industry's priorities for the coming years, identifying climate change, pandemic resilience, digitalization, and cybersecurity as priority focus areas. Regarding the latter, key stakeholders in the aviation industry, as well as government, and academia, have shared their insights on how to collectively reduce the vulnerability of our sector and respond in a coordinated and efficient manner to cyber attacks. As you surely know, ICAO has set a cybersecurity governance mechanism that integrate the contributions of all Secretariat Bureaus and Panels in one single stream of activities.

Artificial intelligence, big data applications, and the overall digitalization of aviation are just a few of the frontier technologies that we collectively need to better understand, especially when trying to shape ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices, or SARPs.

This illustrates how the pace of innovation today is placing significant demands on ICAO, which in turn impacts States, who must evolve their national and regional infrastructure and regulatory systems in accordance with global norms and strategies. Many are not fully equipped to respond to the extent and pace of modernization required.

Today, new entrants, advanced air mobility, evolving operational paradigms, and new certification and oversight models are among the changes challenging regulators and aviation master planners today to be radical.

As always, it is in the spirit of cooperation inscribed in the Chicago Convention 80 years ago that we can address these and the many other challenges and opportunities facing us today.

I would therefore like to conclude my remarks by encouraging MID States to continue their active engagement with the ICAO MID Regional Office and active participation in relevant regional groups.

Despite the current geopolitical challenges confronting the Middle East Region, ICAO has been working with you to ensure that regional activities and achievements are still progressing. Regional Director Mr. Abu Baker will shortly be providing you with a progress report on these activities.

I would like to take a moment here to commend the spirit of cooperation and respect for safety prioritization exemplified by the rapid addressing of the several ATM operational challenges through the MID Contingency Coordination Teams (CCTs) and the ATM Contingency Plan, in particular in difficult moments as those that we are living now.

Excellencies and colleagues, ICAO, as always, remains extremely grateful for the dedication of our Member States, and all of our future objectives together will rely on our continuing and very successful collaborations.

I wish you all a very productive meeting and assure you that ICAO is looking forward to helping you implement its outcomes.

Thank you.