

Speech Delivered at the COVID-19 Information Sharing Teleconference, APAC DGCA

March 31, 2020

First of all, I would like to thank our ICAO Asia-Pacific Regional Office for timely calling up this video-conference with civil aviation directors-general of this region, to discuss joint response to the COVID-19 epidemic.

The worldwide rapid spread of the novel coronavirus has imposed significant impact on world economy, and caused a shock on the aviation industry. Facing the sudden outbreak, the Chinese government acted quick and adopted robust prevention and control measures to contain the spread of the epidemic, which have been proved effective with positive results witnessed by us all. For the moment, as China sees very few newly increased cases every day, and all of which are imported from overseas, the measures taken by China to fight the virus and the experience learned therein have been widely recognized and shared from across the world.

Prevention and control of COVID-19 requires global efforts, as we realized a critical step and key to success for global civil aviation to respond to a disease outbreak or sudden disaster is to enhance international cooperation, including timely and fully sharing of information and corresponding measures taken with our colleagues around the world. China is ready to share its experience in combating virus with all countries, which for sure include experience of China's aviation industry. The following is some of our current practices and experience in civil aviation that we would like to share with you all.

I. Safety-First Strategy

As safety always represents the first priority of our industry, it remained so for the CAAC during the epidemic. For instance, in viewing of the sharp decline in the transport market and large drop of flights has led to wide-scale operation suspension for airlines' aircrew and reduced flight operation proficiency of pilots, CAAC required airlines to enhance simulator training for flight crew to maintain their flight techniques, keep licenses valid and ensure flight safety.

II. Epidemic Prevention and Control Practices and Experience

1. Launching emergency plan and enhancing inter-agency coordination

Since the beginning of the epidemic, China established a joint prevention and control

mechanism at state level, under which CAAC could coordinate efficiently with China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, General Administration of Customs, National Health Commission and local provincial and municipal governments. As the epidemic situation constantly evolves, present prevention and control efforts in China focused mainly on the prevention of imported cases. Therefore, authorities in charge of administration of civil airports have continued efficient cooperation with local governments by forming a highly-efficient mechanism for epidemic prevention and control at entry points, which enables data sharing, cases and suspect cases handling, and coordination of prevention and control efforts, leading to a detail network at all points to guard against imported infection risks.

Taking Beijing for example, being an important international port of China, it is among the highest priorities to prevent imported infection risks. As such, we set up a frontline commanding headquarters at the airports to further strengthen front-line commanding, front-oriented approach, emergency decision-making and precisely targeted prevention and control. General Administration of Customs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Health Commission and Immigration Bureau would timely share information on highlighted personnel related to epidemic that are entering China. We implemented strict inspection measures (for screening, 100% inspection on health declaration, overall body temperature monitoring and strict medical inspection; for medical screening, investigation from epidemiology perspective, medical perspective and via lab tests; and for handling, transfer, quarantine and observation as per provisions). For the flights arriving in Beijing, we have developed categorized handling plan for major flights from countries with serious epidemic situation to jointly prevent and control imported cases. Currently, passengers entering China from Beijing are divided into three categories for administration. First, **those with symptoms** will be subject to screening in strict accordance with portal prevention and control technical plan, and transferred to designated hospitals. Second, **those in close contact** with confirmed cases will be transferred to designated isolation points for quarantine and observation. Third, **other transfer passengers**, among which those transfer during the day will wait for boarding at isolated areas, and others who stay overnight will be arranged by disease control entity and relevant government agencies to quarantine at designated places. And on the basis of inspection and testing by the customs and immigration departments, Beijing will further implement transfer, isolation and observation for people classified into four categories.

2. Distinguishing flights by risk levels

CAAC has issued in succession 4 editions of Preventing Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Guidelines for Airlines and Airports, which classified flights into the three levels of high-risk, medium-risk and low-risk to implement differentiated safety control and guide airlines and airports on epidemic prevention and control. Detailed level-specific prevention and control measures were developed on the basis of aircraft and airport ventilation, disinfection and waste disposal measures adopted at the early stage, taking into consideration of the epidemic situation at origins of flights, aircraft types, passenger profile, load factors and flight

operation characteristics, so as to realize precise prevention and control and targeted decision making.

Low-risk flights will be subject to temperature monitoring and requirements of wearing disposable medical masks and setting up emergency isolation area in cabin, to ensure smooth domestic and international flow of passengers and cargo.

Medium-risk flights, on the basis of prevention and control measures for low-risk flights, will also be subject to in-flight body temperature monitoring based on flight distance and requirements of wearing surgical masks, improved risk prevention standards, timely adjustment of operation procedures, reasonable seating arrangement and reduced movement of people on board.

High-risk flights will apply simplified in-flight service, upgraded prevention and control measure for crew and area-specific passenger service. Passengers once found suspicious will be immediately seated in isolated area and timely informed with destination airport. For **countries (regions) with severe epidemic situation**, transport plans will be developed based on disease-spread risks, including arranging for temporary or chartered flights to take back Chinese nationals abroad and to ease prevention and control pressure from people taking different flights back to China. Passengers of such temporary or chartered flights will be required to wear surgical masks or those of higher standards among other strict control measures, to resolutely contain spread of epidemic via aircraft.

3. Developing instructions to guide prevention and control at key links.

CAAC has identified aircraft, airports and frontline staff as priorities for epidemic prevention and control efforts, and thus developed and continuously updated, based on experience gained and ICAO's standards and guidelines, Preventing Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) Guideline for Airlines and Airports, which have already been updated to the 4th edition.

3.1 Aircraft

Aircraft ventilation and disinfection shall be stepped up. The frequency of inspection and replacement of HEPA are increased. During flight, maximum ventilation shall be used to the greatest extent possible, and APU should be used for ventilation throughout the period of ground operation. The procedures for preventative, ongoing and terminal disinfection of aircraft shall be standardized to ensure its effectiveness.

On-board contagion risks need to be curbed by means of putting caps on the load factor of international flights, arranging the layout of passenger cabin in a reasonable manner, seating passengers with at least one empty seat between each other, and those passengers that require additional attention shall be seated every other row.

The procedure of in-flight service is optimized. Cabin crew should be assigned to provide service for certain areas, and designated crew members should provide basic service for the flight crew. Only pre-packaged food and bottled water shall be served on board, which can be provided for passengers before or during boarding.

Measures for the emergency handling of on-board medical incidents shall be refined.

Emergency quarantine area shall be set up based on the level of flight risks, and a lavatory should be designated for quarantined passengers to use exclusively. On-board passengers with suspicious symptoms such as fever should be quarantined in a timely manner to reduce the risk of cross infection.

3.2 Airport

Airport ventilation and disinfection shall be intensified. All arriving and departing passengers should have their body temperatures taken and their information shall be submitted online. Efforts shall be made in wastes sorting and the collection and disposal of used masks.

Special zones for arriving passengers, transfer travelers, observation, resting, passport control and security inspection should be set up. Passengers on flights arriving from severely affected countries or regions should be handled in an all-in-one zone. Special transfer procedures and roads should be identified for passengers with abnormal body temperature during entry to avoid contact with other passengers.

3.3 Personal protection of frontline staff

CAAC has proposed different personal protection requirements for civil aviation frontline staff such as crew members, maintenance personnel, staff at check-in counters, security inspection personnel, health care workers at airports, and cleaning staff based on the risk levels of flights as well as risks associated with occupational exposure. In particular, flight crew of high-risk flights should wear surgical masks or facial masks of higher standards, and cabin crew should wear N95 masks or masks of higher standards. Crew members should also wear goggles, and cabin crew also need to wear gloves since they have to serve passengers.

During flight operation, crew members should enter the cockpit less and use exclusive lavatories, and it is recommended that the crew members use the intercom system for communication and avoid close contact.

4. Making overall arrangements to support the operation of airlines

CAAC has established an international flight coordination mechanism, which enabled the usage of data from multiple channels to monitor and analyze the real time flow of passengers, so as to analyze and evaluate the trend of return trips in a reasonable manner. Also, by the close following market demands and assessment of the situation of the outbreak, the flight plans of domestic and foreign airlines are issued regularly. Meanwhile, targeted measures such as charter flights and separate passages at airports are adopted in key areas, and transport capacity is coordinated for key groups.

Focusing on difficulties cropped during the outbreak such as the arrangement of crew members, the preservation of historic flight slots after the cut-down of flights, the dramatic decrease of passenger flights, the lack of loading capacity of cargo hold, and the increasing pressure on air cargo transport, CAAC has adopted a series of measures.

CAAC issued joint notice with the General Administration of Customs of China, which put forward quarantine and health screening measures for crew members different from those for ordinary passengers. It is required for in the notice that airports should arrange special passages for crew members during this special period to reduce the risk of exposure and infection. Crew members that have performed

international flights shall be subject to centralized isolation, and during which period, tasks could also be performed.

CAAC introduced relief measures such as reducing taxes and charges in these extraordinary time in a prompt manner. Financial supports are given to airlines operating flights and cargo transport is encouraged by means of both scheduled and non-scheduled flights to ensure the moving of cargo and a stable global supply chain. Special missions during this critical time are actively supported, and airlines can retain their historic flight slots.

III. Boosting International Cooperation and Sharing Experience and Measures on Disease Prevention and Control

CAAC has intensified communication and cooperation with countries and international organizations such as ICAO, IATA and ACI during the outbreak, and exchanged ideas on issues such as the preservation of historic flight slots, the exemption of crew from quarantine among other restrictions, and relief measures pertaining to taxes and charges. CAAC has also shared the technical guidance on epidemic prevention with more than 40 countries with flight connections, promoting other countries to adopt the same level of prevention and control measures to curb the spread of the epidemic.

China submitted a working paper to the ICAO Council, calling on countries and stakeholders to strengthen international cooperation against the epidemic. The Council of ICAO made a decision on March 6 and issued a declaration on March 9.

IV. Issues to Be Solved

Coronavirus has been spreading across the world and countries have adopted temporary restrictions as per specific national conditions to combat the epidemic.

We believe countries could communicate and cooperate more by informing ICAO's Asia-Pacific Office of the adopted restrictive measures, and therefore these measures could be summarized by the Office and be updated and released on a daily basis.

We hope that landing fees and air navigation charges of flights could be reduced or exempted during the outbreak, and flexible policies (lift restrictions such as curfews temporarily) could be adopted to encourage the increase of international cargo flights when cargo capacity are experiencing major drops due to the huge cut-down of passenger flights, so as to facilitate the delivery of prevention and protection material and ensure a steady international cargo supply chain.

We hope that ICAO could give full play to its role of leadership and quickly organize an expert group or a task force to tease out and update related guidance materials through online meetings and exchanges to guide civil aviation of various countries in fighting the pandemic and maintain the healthy development of international civil aviation.

Last but not least, I would like to thank Mr. Mishra, Regional Director of ICAO's Asia and Pacific Office and his team for their hard work online at home during the dire time, as well as the timely information send to civil aviation authorities in our region regarding the notes for attending conference, cancellation of meetings, and information on COVID-19. I also want to thank our colleagues for your cooperation. This is a harsh time for global civil aviation. Let us get united, work side by side to take the challenges and act swiftly to weather the hard times.