



ICAO ELEVENTH MEETING OF THE REGIONAL AVIATION SAFETY GROUP - ASIA AND PACIFIC REGIONS (RASG-APAC/11)

(Video Teleconference, 25-26 November 2021 at 10:00-13:00 hrs. Bangkok Time, UTC+7)

Agenda Item 4: ICAO/ Member State / Industry Presentations

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE OUTCOMES OF HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON COVID-19 IN HONG KONG, CHINA

(Presented by Hong Kong, China)

SUMMARY

The High-level Conference on COVID-19 (“HLCC 2021”) held from 12 to 22 October 2021 has provided a platform to promote and strengthen international collaboration on aviation recovery, resilience and sustainability. The outcomes of HLCC 2021 demonstrate solidarity and determination of States, Administration and the international aviation community in facilitating the recovery of air transport from the COVID-19 pandemic while building a foundation to strengthen resilience in aviation and make it more sustainable in the future.

Hong Kong, China fully supports the work of ICAO and is working closely with stakeholders in reviewing and implementing the outcomes of HLCC 2021. This paper shares the latest implementation efforts made and the measures taken by Hong Kong, China in particular areas such as managing operational impacts arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and maintaining safety standards and personnel competency. Proactive measures to facilitate the safe and efficient recovery of air transport were also highlighted.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 With much gratitude to the extensive coordination efforts made by ICAO, the High-level Conference on COVID-19 (“HLCC 2021”) was successfully held through online means from 12 to 22 October 2021. Albeit in a virtual mode, HLCC 2021 has provided a useful platform for States, Administrations and stakeholders in the international aviation community to collaborate, promote and strengthen international collaboration on aviation recovery, resilience and sustainability. A broad range of issues were discussed to facilitate the recovery of air transport from the COVID-19 crisis while building a foundation to strengthen resilience in aviation and make it more sustainable in the future.

1.2 With the objectives and outcomes of HLCC 2021 in mind, Hong Kong, China acknowledges the importance of the work of the ICAO in leading a safe aviation recovery and building resilience and sustainability in the civil aviation system. Hong Kong, China will render full support to ICAO and will continue to work closely with States, Administrations and the international aviation community to implement the applicable outcomes of HLCC 2021. Taking the opportunity, Hong Kong, China would like to share our experiences and the latest implementation efforts made in this regard.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 *Continued Support for the Aviation Sector to Ensure Safety*

2.1.1 Recognizing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the local and global aviation community, Hong Kong, China welcomes ICAO's *global leadership to facilitate aviation's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure its future resilience [ref Paragraph 1 of the Ministerial Declaration]*. Safety remains a top priority. The Civil Aviation Department ("CAD") of Hong Kong, China is committed to ensuring a safe, secure, and orderly resumption of air traffic in line with the relevant ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce ("CART") guidance and recommendations.

2.1.2 Under the Safety Management Programme of Hong Kong, China, the CAD has in place a risk-based safety oversight and safety surveillance system, which includes the proactive identification of hazards and management of safety risks. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, COVID-19 related risks were identified as an emerging issue requiring proactive risk management. A risk management approach was adopted by the CAD when establishing various temporary relief measures to air operators which encountered operational difficulties, as well as on safety oversight and safety surveillance, during the pandemic. The temporary relief measures, which included for instance, the transportation of cargo in passenger cabin, were regularly reviewed with a risk-based approach in accordance with the latest ICAO CART's recommendations. Continuous surveillance through both physical and remote audits and inspections were maintained at all times to ensure compliance to regulatory requirements.

2.1.3 An overall review in 2020 conducted by CAD indicated that there was no degradation of the safety standards maintained by the multi-disciplinary aviation industry in Hong Kong, China.

2.2 *Facilitation of Air Transportation of Vaccines and Essential Medical Supplies*

2.2.1 In keeping global air cargo flow, particularly those involving the delivery of vaccines, medical supplies and equipment, the CAD is cognizant of the key role played by the air cargo industry and the operational needs of the airlines and the industry in effecting timely response to fast-changing market demands. With reference to the HLCC 2021 outcomes, Hong Kong, China will continue to facilitate *the air transportation of vaccines as well as essential medical supplies and personnel in support of the global effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other crises and emergencies [ref Paragraph 4 of the Ministerial Declaration]*.

2.2.2 More specifically, to meet the industry's needs, the CAD has made extra efforts and taken proactive steps in providing as much facilitation as we can to the industry in regard to the operations of air cargo services to and from the Hong Kong International Airport ("HKIA"). The flight application processes were enhanced with clear guidelines given to the industry through Aeronautical Information Circulars. This has helped the industry furnish urgent applications to the CAD in an organised and holistic manner which would also enable the applications to be processed expeditiously to allow the timely transportation of essential supplies to destinations around the globe. As shown in the HKIA statistics, the number of cargo flights operated to and from the HKIA in 2020 has increased by around 11,000. This represented an increase of about 19% compared to that in 2019. The increasing trend continues for 2021.

2.2.3 From the air cargo safety perspective, the CAD has adopted new measures in the ICAO Technical Instructions for the Safe Transport of Dangerous Goods by Air (Doc 9284) and collaborated with aircraft operators and their ground handling agents to ensure safe and efficient transport of COVID-19 vaccines. Hong Kong, China will continue to keep in view the ICAO's latest guidelines and the support needed by the industry to sustain the global cargo and vaccines supply chain while ensuring aviation safety.

2.2.4 On the air cargo security front, in line with the spirit of ensuring that COVID-19 vaccines would be distributed successfully and timely to support global recovery efforts, Hong Kong, China has coordinated closely with various operational stakeholders to facilitate the movement of COVID-19 vaccines at the HKIA in accordance with the recommendations by the ICAO, such as ensuring that COVID-19 vaccines transferred at the airport are only accessible to authorized staff.

2.2.5 By ensuring that the needed infrastructure, equipment and procedures are geared up for the import and transshipment of vaccines, the HKIA has positioned itself as the preferred hub for vaccines transportation.

2.3 *Ensuring Operational Readiness of Aviation Personnel and Airworthiness of Aircraft*

2.3.1 On operational readiness and recovery, Hong Kong, China is committed *to ensuring a safe, secure, and orderly flow of traffic with operational readiness of aviation personnel, in particular aircrew and air traffic controllers, as well as the airworthiness of aircraft [ref Paragraph 6 of the Ministerial Declaration]*. More specifically, noting the reduction in passenger traffic demands, the CAD acknowledged that the opportunities for air crew of passenger flights to perform flight duties would reduce in tandem. Risk assessments were conducted in collaboration with the industry to address the possible impact of having low flying hours for a prolonged period on pilot proficiency. Based on the assessment results, temporary relief measures were granted to local air operators for facilitating the maintenance of their flight crew's flying competence and recency while in compliance with the respective ICAO standards and recommended practices.

2.3.2 To facilitate air operators in the development of a service resumption plan, relevant guidance in the form of Flight Operations Notices ("FON") and other advisories, have also been issued to the industry with special highlights on the "skill fade" issue. Operators are advised to review and mitigate human performance risks, including "skill fade", as operations resume. The CAD will continue to keep a close dialogue with the air operators to ensure the safe resumption of traffic with operationally ready staff.

2.3.3 Similar to air crew, the reduction in air traffic has also posed difficulties for air traffic controllers ("ATCOs") to stay conversant with the techniques on handling high density traffic as well as trainees undergoing on-the-job training ("OJT") who have to demonstrate competencies under various traffic scenarios. To overcome this operational and training challenge, additional simulator sessions with pre-pandemic traffic density have been used and provided for rated controllers and trainees under OJT in Hong Kong, China. Furthermore, a special interim arrangement has been established between the air navigation service provider and the regulator in Hong Kong, China, for the initial competence assessments of new ATCOs to be conducted in both live and simulated traffic environments, where the latter will provide higher traffic density. To ensure operational readiness and competency of the ATCOs being assessed, the initial assessment will be further supplemented by a re-validation assessment conducted within a 12-month period or when traffic is returned to a pre-defined level. These interim arrangements would be kept under review as we prepare for traffic recovery.

2.3.4 On the aircraft technical side, the decline in air traffic has also caused a significant number of aircraft to be grounded globally. Issues associated with the grounding of aircraft and their return to service, such as aircraft preservation and de-preservation processes, could cause potential impact to airworthiness. In this connection, local air operators have strictly followed aircraft manufacturers' instructions for the preservation and de-preservation works on their aircraft and would regularly update CAD on the aircraft status. The CAD has also been conducting regular aircraft surveys to ensure continuing airworthiness of the aircraft grounded in Hong Kong. In addition, CAD has studied the ICAO CART recommendations and published Airworthiness Notice with procedures and checklist provided for the air operators for ensuring the airworthiness of aircraft during and after long term parking or storage. These proactive measures will facilitate the air operators' planning and re-activation of aircraft to support the recovery of air transport operations when traffic demand returns.

2.4 *Way Forward - Commitment to Support ICAO Initiatives and International Collaboration on HLCC 2021 Outcomes*

2.4.1 The above are just a few examples of how Hong Kong, China endeavours to ensure the safe, secure, and orderly resumption of air traffic in line with relevant guidance and recommendations of ICAO, and the outcomes of HLCC 2021. Despite all the difficulties and challenges, safety is still a top priority for all involved in aviation. Hong Kong, China will continue to facilitate the development of resilience and sustainability in civil aviation.

3. ACTION BY THE MEETING

3.1 The Meeting is invited to note Hong Kong, China's efforts in implementing ICAO CART recommendations and guidelines, and the outcomes of HLCC 2021.

3.2 Member States/Administrations are encouraged to share their experience and national best practices in facilitating the safe and efficient recovery of aviation as well as their considerations and plan for the implementation of outcomes of HLCC 2021.

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