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AGENDA ITEM 3: AVIATION SAFETY

**CLOSING THE INVESTIGATION GAP: ENSURING TIMELY
INTERIM STATEMENTS AND COMPREHENSIVE
INVESTIGATION FINAL REPORTS FOR
TANGIBLE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS**

Presented by the International Air Transport Association (IATA)

SUMMARY

This paper addresses the critical gap in aviation accident and serious incident investigation processes, focusing specifically on the timely issuance of interim statements and the production of comprehensive final investigation reports. Despite clear obligations under ICAO Annex 13, there are persistent delays in the publication of both interim statements and final reports, indicating ongoing noncompliance. Between 2019-2023 in the Asia and Pacific (APAC) Region, 68% of accidents had a final report published.

The paper examines the consequences of delayed interim communications, including the lack of timely information, dissemination of misleading information, erosion of public confidence, and missed opportunities for immediate safety interventions. It further analyses the impact of incomplete or delayed final reports on the industry's ability to implement safety improvements. Drawing on regional data and international best practices, this paper proposes a structured framework for enhancing investigation.

CLOSING THE INVESTIGATION GAP: ENSURING TIMELY INTERIM STATEMENTS AND COMPREHENSIVE INVESTIGATION FINAL REPORTS FOR TANGIBLE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aviation accident and incident investigation serve as the foundation of global aviation safety. Under the Chicago Convention and ICAO Annex 13, The State of occurrence bears primary responsibility for notification, investigation, and reporting of accidents and serious incidents, including the timely publication of findings, and the dissemination of safety recommendations. The objective of every investigation is not to apportion blame or liability, but to determine the contributing factors and prevent reoccurrences. This purpose can only be fulfilled when investigation outputs are issued in a timely, transparent, and comprehensive manner.

1.2 At the 58th DGCA Conference held in Dhaka in October 2023, IATA presented a discussion paper highlighting deficiencies in accident investigation reporting within the Asia Pacific region. Subsequent analysis at the 59th DGCA Conference confirmed that while some progress has been made, significant challenges remain. At the 60th DGCA Conference, IATA reaffirmed the importance of timely publication of the investigation final reports and where this is not feasible, interim statement should be issued on each anniversary of the occurrence.

1.3 Interim statements serve a critical communications function, detailing investigation progress and safety issues raised, particularly when final reports cannot be made publicly available within twelve months in accordance with ICAO Annex 13. However, practices vary significantly across regions, with some States issuing detailed factual updates, while others issue limited or no information. Data from the IATA database indicates that fewer than 10% comply with ICAO annex 13 obligations.

1.4 Final investigation reports represent the culmination of investigative work and contain the detailed analysis, findings, contributing factors, and safety recommendations necessary to prevent recurrence. ICAO Annex 13 establishes that final reports shall be made publicly available as soon as possible and, if possible, within twelve months.

1.5 Similar to the timely publication of final reports, the preliminary reports must also be published in a timely manner following an accident or incident to ensure the rapid dissemination of key factual information early in the process. This helps prevent misinterpretation, speculation, and the spread of misinformation. Timely release is crucial for communicating and highlighting safety issues identified in the investigation's early findings, allowing authorities to take corrective and preventive actions in a timely manner.

1.6 IATA's review of investigations conducted between 2019 and 2023 shows that only 63% of the 203 accidents in that period had completed reports. Because investigations often take more than a year to finalize, a five-year dataset ending in 2023 provides a reliable picture of global performance. Still, a completion rate of 63% remains far from satisfactory.

1.7 Delays, incomplete findings, or the absence of published accident investigation reports deprive the industry of critical safety insights. These insights are essential for preventing future occurrences and strengthening global aviation safety.

1.8 To support greater clarity on the investigative process, IATA, in collaboration with ICAO and IFALPA, has published an [infographic](#) outlining the key steps of ICAO Annex 13 when an event meets Annex 13 criteria.

1.9 This paper builds upon previous discussions and proposes concrete measures to close the investigation gap. It addresses both the timely issuance of interim statements and the production of comprehensive final reports, recognizing that both are essential components of an effective safety investigation system. The recommendations presented aim to strengthen regional collaboration, standardize practices, and ensure that every accident and serious incident yields tangible safety improvements for the entire aviation community.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The Investigation Gap: Current Status and Regional Data

2.1.1 Analysis of IATA accident data covering the period 2019-2023 reveals concerning trends in investigation timeliness across the APAC region. Of the 34 accidents classified by the IATA Accident Classification Task Force (ACTF) only 23 resulted in published final reports, representing a 68% compliance rate. This falls significantly below the target of 100% compliance with Annex 13 provisions.

2.1.2 Delays in investigation outputs have tangible safety consequences. Each month of delay in publishing a final report represents a month where the industry is denied critical safety knowledge. For accidents involving systemic issues or emerging risks, this delay can directly contribute to preventable future occurrences. Furthermore, the absence of timely interim statements creates an information vacuum that is often filled with speculation and misinformation, damaging public confidence in aviation safety.

2.2 Interim Statements: Purpose, Standards, and Best Practices

2.2.1 Interim statements serve three essential safety and communications functions:

- Factual communication: Providing confirmed information to prevent speculation and misinformation
- Immediate safety Issues and actions: Identifying urgent safety concerns that require immediate industry attention
- Stakeholder assurance: Demonstrating that a rigorous investigation is underway and safety is the priority

2.2.2 To enhance global consistency and transparency, in accident investigation and serious incidents conducted under annex 13. It is proposed that States be encouraged to issue interim statements as an integral part of the investigation process, when a final report cannot be made available within the 12 months. Interim Statement should be recognized as structured safety communication intended to disseminate update factual information, outline the status of investigative activities, and highlight any immediate safety action, without apportioning any blame. Importantly, such statements must avoid speculative conclusions or premature determinations of information or contributing factors. Their purpose is to communicate established facts, not to advance theories. This discipline protects the integrity of the investigation and maintains public trust.

2.3 Safety Recommendations

2.3.1 IATA created a safety recommendations repository that is a valuable tool for preventing future accidents and incidents. It plays a role in:

- Identifying systemic safety issues – when multiple investigations result in similar recommendations, it indicates a recurring safety deficiency in aviation;
- Assigning greater weight and urgency to global actions – encourages all stakeholders to be proactive when evidence suggests that an issue is not isolated;
- Facilitating harmonized safety improvements – it supports the development of standardized safety enhancements and strengthens compliance monitoring efforts;
- Improving investigation effectiveness – by making investigation reports more valuable, targeted, and impactful.

2.3.2 To strengthen the effectiveness of the safety recommendation process under ICAO Annex 13, it is proposed that safety recommendations should be issued and disseminated to the concerned party without delay when safety action is needed. Such sharing should aim to enhance

collective learning across the global aviation safety system, support harmonized implementation practices, and reinforce the preventive objective of accident and incident investigation.

2.3.3 IATA has produced a leaflet on the characteristics of effective safety recommendations, including but not limited to the following elements:

- Clear and precise language
- Non-punitive learning and safety oriented
- Practical and cost effective
- Achievable and realistic
- Addressed to the appropriate responsible entity
- Release without delay

This leaflet will soon be published.

2.4 Final Investigation Reports: Comprehensiveness and Quality Standards

2.4.1 A comprehensive final investigation report represents the culmination of months of rigorous investigative work. Annex 13 specifies the required content, including:

- Factual information covering all relevant aspects of the occurrence
- Effective investigation techniques
- Analysis of the facts and determination of contributing factors
- Conclusions based on the analysis
- Safety actions and Safety recommendations designed to prevent recurrence

2.4.2 Comprehensive final reports should incorporate the following elements of modern safety investigation:

- Systems-based approach: Analysis of organisational factors, not just individual actions
- Human factors integration: Consideration of human performance limitations and ergonomic factors
- Safety barrier analysis: Identification of failed or absent safety defences
- Performance based and justified: All findings supported by robust evidence
- SMART safety recommendations: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound

2.4.3 While Annex 13 specifies that reporting shall be published in one of the ICAO official languages, ideally, an English version of the final report should always be published. As the international language of aviation, English facilitates the sharing of vital information, improves understanding of concerns amongst aviation professionals from other countries, and ensures a faster dissemination and implementation of safety recommendations.

2.5 Factors contributing to Investigation Delays and Quality Gaps: Delays in accident investigations and gaps in report quality may be attributed to a range of factors, including but not limited to those outlined below. It is recommended that a comprehensive survey be undertaken to systematically identify the root causes of non-compliance with Annex 13 provisions.

- Inadequate resources, technical expertise, or funding to conduct timely Annex 13 investigations.
- Investigator competency, emphasizing that all aircraft accident investigators should be active, current, with updated skills, such as training in advanced data analysis techniques.
- For States lacking the necessary resources for investigations, the establishment of a Regional Accident and Incident Investigation Organization (RAIO) represent a practical approach to effectively conduct a full accident investigation to the delivery of a final report.

- Major complex investigations can overwhelm national capacity, leading to significant delays
- Independence Challenges: A foundational requirement of Annex 13 is that Accident Investigation Authorities (AIA) be functionally independent of regulatory and operational entities. However, many investigation authorities in the region remain organisationally embedded within Civil Aviation Authorities or transport ministries, creating potential conflicts of interest and diverting resources from investigation work.

2.6 Regional Collaboration and Support Mechanisms

2.6.1 Regional cooperation represents the most promising pathway to closing the investigation gap. The experience of the European Network of Civil Aviation Safety Investigation Authorities (ENCASIA) demonstrates how structured regional collaboration can enhance investigation capacity while preserving national independence. Key elements include:

- Mutual Support Systems: Establishing a regional mechanism for rapid deployment of investigative resources and expertise during major accidents. This would enable States with limited capacity to access specialised support from regional partners.
- Standardised Training and Certification: Developing regional investigation training programmes and professional certification standards to build consistent expertise across participating States.
- Peer Review Programmes: Implementing systematic peer review of investigation processes and reports to enhance quality and identify improvement opportunities.
- Shared Tools and Resources: Creating regional repositories of investigation templates, guidance materials, and analytical tools to support national investigation authorities.

2.6.2 The Asia Pacific Accident Investigation Group (APAC-AIG), operating under RASG-APAC, provides an existing platform that could be enhanced to deliver these support functions. Expanding APAC-AIG's mandate to include practical operational support, beyond coordination and information sharing, would directly address capacity constraints.

2.6.3 Additionally, the provisions of ICAO Annex 13 Chapter 5.1 explicitly allow States to delegate investigation responsibilities to other States or Regional Accident and Incident Investigation Organizations (RAIOs) by mutual consent. This provision should be actively promoted and facilitated to enable States with limited capacity to ensure high-quality, timely investigations through partnership arrangements.

2.7 Accountability and Performance Metrics

2.7.1 Closing the investigation gap requires clear accountability mechanisms and performance metrics. Currently, USOAP Effective Implementation (EI) metrics capture general compliance with Annex 13 but do not specifically measure timeliness or report quality. Enhanced metrics should include:

- Percentage of final reports published within 12 months
- Time to issuance of first factual interim statement
- Completeness scores for final reports against standard criteria
- Implementation rate of safety recommendations
- Publication of English language versions

2.7.2 These metrics should be tracked through RASG-APAC and reported annually to the DGCA Conference. Transparent reporting of performance against these indicators will create accountability and drive continuous improvement across the region.

2.7.3 Furthermore, safety recommendations from investigation reports require systematic tracking to ensure implementation. The establishment of a regional Safety Recommendation Information System, similar to that used by ENCASIA, would enable monitoring of recommendation status and facilitate learning from implemented measures.

3. ACTION BY THE CONFERENCE

3.1 The Conference is invited to:

- a) note the importance of timely publication and dissemination of interim statements, strengthening safety recommendations and comprehensive final investigation reports as essential components of the aviation safety learning cycle;
- b) promote greater compliance with Annex 13 by calling on all States in the region to fully implement its provisions, including the strict adherence to timelines set forth therein;
- c) encourage States to strengthen the functional independence of their Accident Investigation Authorities in accordance with Annex 13 requirements;
- d) encourage States to actively utilize the provisions of Annex 13 Chapter 5.1 regarding delegation of investigations to other States or regional organizations where national capacity constraints may prevent timely, high-quality outcomes; and
- e) encourage collaboration between ICAO, IATA, Flight Safety Foundation, and other regional partners to provide technical assistance and capacity building support to States seeking to enhance their investigation capabilities.

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