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WORKING PAPER

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Agenda Item 3: Strengthening regulatory and institutional frameworks
3.3: Strengthening emergency planning mechanism and consumer protection for a resilient aviation system

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ICAO POLICY ON ASSISTANCE TO AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES (DOC 9998)

(Presented by the Air Crash Victims' Families' Federation International (ACVFFI))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper examines the persistent implementation gap in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Policy on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and their Families (Doc 9998) and the associated Manual (Manual on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and their Families, Doc 9973), notwithstanding the 2022 upgrade of Recommended Practice 8.46 to Standard 8.43 of Annex 9. The ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) data shows a low level of effective implementation. The Air Crash Victims' Families' Federation International (ACVFFI) maintains that the problem is not the quality of the 2013 documents, but their uneven application. The priority is effective implementation, oversight, training, and the genuine inclusion of families in planning, capacity-building and response.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Assistance to aircraft accident victims and their families is not an optional humanitarian add-on: it is a component of aviation-system resilience and of passenger protection in the gravest of disruptions. Doc 9998 (2013) and Doc 9973 (2013) set out ICAO policy and guidance. The Assembly and the Council have reaffirmed that policy in successive resolutions, including A42-15.

1.2 ATConf/6 (2013) advanced operational consumer-protection principles. Post-accident assistance, by contrast, was developed mainly in the facilitation and Assembly tracks. ATConf/7 now offers an opportunity to link that obligation to the economic and regulatory resilience of air transport, without duplicating the Secretariat paper on consumer protection and emergency planning.

1.3 The Air Crash Victims' Families' Federation International (ACVFFI), the international organization that brings together the voice of families and that has accompanied and driven this work before

[1] English, Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian and Spanish versions provided by ACVFII.

the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) since its establishment, presents this paper so that the Conference places implementation, not a rewriting of the guidance, at the center of the debate.

2. THE IMPLEMENTATION GAP

2.1 Almost thirteen years after the approval of Doc 9998, and almost four years after Standard 8.43 of Annex 9 became applicable, effective implementation remains critically low. According to data presented to the Facilitation Panel Working Group on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and their Families (FALP/14), the Effective Implementation (EI) score for the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) Protocol Question 6.383 among the 55 States audited as of February 2026 was 10.91 per cent. Only six States were assessed as satisfactory.

2.2 That figure is not a technical detail. It means that, when an accident occurs, most families still face delays, contradictory information, the absence of a clear counterpart and a lack of immediate support. The upgrade to a Standard was a necessary normative achievement; it has not been sufficient to change practice.

2.3 ACVFFI maintains the clarity and effectiveness of Doc 9998 and Doc 9973. Until there is a critical mass of applied national plans, exercises conducted and lessons documented, any revision would lack a sufficient empirical basis and would divert resources from what is urgent: that States apply the policy now in force.

3. PRIORITIES

3.1 Operative legislation and a national plan. States must have not only a legal reference text, but a National Family Assistance Plan with functions, time frames, assistance centers, notification of families before the public release of passenger lists, management of personal effects, advance payments where applicable, and coordination among authorities, operators and third parties.

3.2 **Oversight.** ICAO should maintain and strengthen USOAP/ Electronic Filing of Differences (EFOD) monitoring of the Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and Families (AAAVF) file, identify the causes of non-compliance and direct support to States with the largest gaps, consistent with the principle that no country is left behind.

3.3 **Usable training.** The AAAVF course should be reviewed for effectiveness and content, and the iPack should be promoted. Its content must be anchored in Doc 9998 and Doc 9973 (ICAO's own system) and not in a single national model. ACVFFI should participate effectively in design, validation and delivery, contributing the experience of those who have lived the response and a professional view of lessons learned.

3.4 **Regional Offices.** Regional workshops will be useful only if they have a clear objective: to make known and apply ICAO's Policy on Assistance to Victims and Families, not merely to exchange heterogeneous national systems that dilute the principal aim: implementation of that Policy. Regional Offices should have uniform guidance and the participation of ACVFFI and its associations.

3.5 In that regard, Spain has funded two workshops on assistance to victims and families through the North American, Central American and Caribbean (NACC)-Mexico and the South American (SAM)-Lima Regional Offices, to be held from 19 to 21 October 2026 in Mexico City and from 1 to 3

December 2026 in Lima, Peru. That approach could serve as a model for other Member States wishing to contribute more directly to implementation of ICAO's Policy on Assistance to Victims.

3.6 **Industry.** The International Air Transport Association's (IATA) 2025 inclusion of a family-assistance chapter in its emergency-response handbook, and the associated strengthening of training, is acknowledged. That progress must be verified in practice and complemented by equivalent integration by Airports Council International (ACI) at airports of departure, arrival and those near the accident site. Cooperation with ACVFFI should be treated as more than a courtesy mention.

4. INCLUSION OF FAMILIES

4.1 Families are not an "audience" of the policy: they are an essential stakeholder. For nearly two decades ACVFFI has driven Standard 8.43, the AAAVF symposia, training and Assembly resolutions. That contribution has been recognized, inter alia, by the 44th Edward Warner Award conferred on ACVFFI for its long record and the milestones achieved in that time.

4.2 Despite this, ACVFFI's participation in expert groups, courses, iPacks and event organization has been uneven. The AAAVF 2021 Symposium recommendations calling for cooperation with ACVFFI before, during and after an accident have not translated into a stable mechanism, but rather into the goodwill of whoever happens to lead each team.

4.3 The Conference should recommend that ICAO, States, IATA and ACI establish concrete modalities for the inclusion of ACVFFI: early consultation in the development of plans and materials; participation in exercises; access to the information needed to contribute experience; and a clear counterpart in the Secretariat for the AAAVF file.

4.4 ACVFFI further invites and urges Member States to bid to host the third AAAVF Symposium in 2027, in accordance with ICAO requirements for events of this type. Hosting would confer on the organizing State the prestige, innovation and credibility of a demonstrated commitment to aircraft accident victims and their families.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 A resilient air transport system is measured not only by the recovery of connectivity, but by the dignity with which people are treated when the flight does not reach its destination. The ICAO framework already exists. What is lacking is its application.

5.2 ATConf/7 should send an unequivocal message: implementation first; genuine inclusion of families; no premature revision of Doc 9998 or Doc 9973.

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