



**Address by the President of the Council of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Roberto Kobeh González,
before the 3rd Annual Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
International Aviation Safety Forum**

(Chantilly, Virginia - 2 November 2006)

Thank you very much Mrs. Blakey for such a warm introduction. It is always a pleasure to see you and especially today. This is my first public presentation since taking office as President of the Council of ICAO and I am delighted that it takes place before such a distinguished audience and on a subject of critical importance to global air transport, namely aviation safety.

By way of opening remarks, I would like to pay tribute to my dear friend and colleague Dr. Assad Kotaite, who retired on 31 July of this year after serving for 30 years as President of the Council of ICAO. It is an honour and a privilege to succeed such a pillar of international civil aviation, for whom the promotion of aviation safety was a lifelong mission.

I would also like to acknowledge the remarkable contribution of the United States to the cause of aviation safety over the years. Right from the creation of ICAO in 1944, the United States has been one of the most ardent supporters of the Organization.

When we speak of aviation safety, members of the aviation community may have different perspectives on the subject, yet for all of us there is one common concern, that of saving and protecting the lives of passengers, crews, and persons on the ground. Without the excellent safety record that we have worked together so hard to achieve over the past half century and more, we would not enjoy the enormous economic, social and cultural benefits of a vibrant air transport industry.

The theme of this Symposium – *Safety From Top to Bottom* – captures the essence of how to maintain and improve on our remarkable performance. In a few words, what is required is an firm commitment from senior management of airlines, airports, service providers, manufacturers, regulators, and all other stakeholders, no matter how small, for aircraft operations to be as safe as is humanly possible.

The commitment to safety must flow down from the top like a waterfall and permeate every part of an organization. Everyone must be focused on safety – in the cockpit or behind the air traffic control screen, on the assembly line of manufacturers and in the maintenance hangar, on board the aircraft or on the tarmac, in a government office or legislative body. Because safety begins in the mind. It is a mindset, an attitude, and must be an integral element of an organization's culture.

At ICAO, safety is, has always been, and will remain our top priority. It is enshrined in the *Convention on International Civil Aviation*. Fifteen of the Convention's 18 Annexes deal with safety and efficiency of air navigation and the annex on Security also relates to safety, since a flight that is not secure is not safe. Safety is the focus of the first of six strategic objectives contained in our Business Plan and it calls upon the Organization to enhance global civil aviation safety through a number of specific measures based on prevention, cooperation and the consistent implementation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices, or SARPs.

After more than 40 years in national and international civil aviation, I am convinced that many accidents would not have occurred if ICAO SARPs contained in the Annexes would have been implemented uniformly and consistently. I am happy to say that there is now within ICAO a clear shift in focus towards implementation of standards. Of course, existing standards will continue to be updated where necessary to keep pace with the evolving aviation industry and new standards will reflect high-level requirements, with a clear benefit for safety. Yet implementation will prevail as the privileged path to improved safety.

The ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) will play an even greater role in this global effort following the Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation (DGCAs) in March of this year. In a landmark decision, DGCAs from 153 participating States agreed to allow ICAO to post results from USOAP on the Organization's public website as soon as possible and no later than March 2008. At present, some 80 States have authorized ICAO to publish the information on audits carried out in their territory and summary reports can now be consulted online. I am sure that many others will respond positively in the months to come.

This is an unprecedented development in terms of increasing transparency and sharing of information among States, as well as with the industry and the travelling public. It should encourage States to correct more quickly the safety deficiencies that remain in their aviation systems and make it easier for States and donors to provide more rapid and more effective assistance to those that require much-needed financial or human resources.

Transparency and sharing of information are also at the heart of the *Unified strategy to resolve safety-related deficiencies* adopted by the 35th Session of the ICAO Assembly in 2004. The strategy emphasizes that free-flow of safety-related information must be embraced by everyone involved in air transport, at every level and across every discipline. This is an essential condition for creating or strengthening partnerships to resolve deficiencies, essentially in the form of regional or sub-regional safety oversight organizations. ICAO, National Civil Aviation Authorities, industry and funding institutions must cooperate in the provision of aviation technical and financial assistance and guidance.

A good example of the potential of transparency for improving safety is Article 21 of the Chicago Convention. Article 21 prescribes that each Contracting State should undertake to supply to any other Contracting State or to ICAO, on demand, information regarding registration and ownership of registered aircraft. When this registration data is shared, it can provide a clearer picture of the status of any given aircraft. States can then make more informed decisions regarding operations by that aircraft within their airspace. ICAO will help the process along with a proposal to facilitate the exchange of data concerning aircraft registrations and some has already been posted on the ICAO website.

At the same time that we are moving in the direction of more openness, the air transport industry is growing consistently, in large part the result of liberalization and exploding markets, most notably in Asia. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) reported earlier that 2006 international passenger traffic for the first half of the year grew 6.7% over the same period in 2005. And by the year 2015, ICAO expects that passenger traffic will have grown to some 2.8 billion passengers annually and 30 million aircraft movements. Concurrently, the privatization of airlines, airports and air navigation services are making inspections of operations more complex and more labour-intensive. It is increasingly difficult to obtain the requisite resources in terms of qualified people and funding to ensure the proper application of safety oversight practices at the regulatory and industry levels.

The answer, of course, lies in Safety Management Systems, or SMS, the most effective way of responding to the need for effective supervision with a relatively small workforce. Many ICAO Member States are implementing or exploring safety management systems to complement the existing regulatory structure. We encourage them to do so and ICAO offers concrete assistance in the form of standards and related guidance material for establishing safety management systems, including a set of aligned safety management provisions for aircraft operations, air traffic services, and aerodromes, as well as model legislation to make it easier to implement SMS.

In all of our communications on the subject, we insist on the fact that safety management is not a matter for individual States alone. It must be carried out in a coordinated and cooperative manner, based on the ICAO framework. All parties involved in civil aviation have responsibilities for safety oversight and compliance.

Global cooperation is essential if we are to successfully meet the tremendous challenges that lie ahead. I am particularly sensitive to the apprehended shortage of qualified and experienced pilots that may result from the consistent growth of airline operations spurred by the steady increase in passenger traffic. And the language proficiency requirements which will become applicable in March of 2008 will require intensive efforts to ensure proper training and certification of pilots and air traffic controllers alike.

Each of you will face a wide range of challenges unique to your industry or area of responsibility. To lead the world aviation community in a cooperative, collaborative and coordinated effort in meeting these challenges, ICAO is well into implementing its first-ever Business Plan designed to streamline the Organization and increase its efficiency and effectiveness. The focus will be on performance-based programmes and initiatives, those that provide the greatest return on investment of limited human and financial resources, through working methods and management practices that lead to identifiable results. ICAO will become more proactive in responding to the needs and expectations of its 189 Contracting States.

In short, we will focus on fulfilling our responsibilities as the world organization mandated in the following key areas:

- the implementation globally of safety management systems designed to achieve measurable results in aviation safety;
- the development of global performance-based security measures amongst States;
- the pursuit of unified and coordinated measures to reduce civil aviation's adverse impact on the environment; and
- the implementation of harmonized air traffic management systems and performance-based efficiency improvements.

Many of these issues will be discussed at the next ordinary session of the ICAO Assembly in 2007. I know that many of you will be there and I invite you to begin reflecting on your contribution to what I expect will be a very constructive and forward-looking Assembly.

Ladies and gentlemen, the 2nd Annual FAA Safety Forum held last year at this time made significant contributions to the debate surrounding aviation safety. I look forward to this 3rd edition to provide us with equally provocative and innovative ways to further the cause of safer skies around the world. The aviation community is looking to meetings like this one for realistic and practicable solutions to the global safety challenge and I am confident that you will meet its expectations. It is in the best interest of all of us.

Thank you again for your kind invitation to be here with you and for the opportunity to take part in what I trust will be a very productive Forum.