



**Address by the President of the Council of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Roberto Kobeh González,
before the XVIIth Ordinary Assembly of the
Latin American Civil Aviation Commission (LACAC)**

(Panama City, 6 November 2006)

It gives me great pleasure to be here in Panama City and to address the seventeenth Ordinary Assembly of LACAC.

I wish first to thank the Government of Panama for the warm welcome it has given us.

When I took office a few months ago as President of the Council, after serving eight years as Representative of Mexico, I felt honoured and privileged to have been elected to a position where I could contribute in a different capacity to help shape the destiny of an Organization that has ensured the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation for almost 62 years now. My new functions have already widened my perspective on the major challenges that confront the aviation community and I would like to share with you today some of my views on what lies on the horizon for States and other stakeholders of the air transport world.

Perhaps the overriding challenge will be to manage the sustained growth of the industry in the years ahead. The International Air Transport Association (IATA) reported recently that international passenger traffic for the first half of 2006 grew 6.7 per cent over the same period in 2005. ICAO's medium-term forecast calls for scheduled passenger traffic to grow by 6.1, 5.8 and 5.6 per cent in 2006, 2007 and 2008 respectively. In that period, the economy of the Latin American and Caribbean Region is expected to achieve growth rates of 4.3, 4.1 and 4.0 per cent, and scheduled passenger traffic of the airlines of the Region for the same period is expected to reflect economic activity with growth rates of 5.0, 4.7 and 4.2 per cent. Over the long term, traffic of those airlines is expected to grow at an average annual rate of 4.0 per cent up to the year 2015.

Much of that growth has come about because of liberalization of the industry. Liberalization is advancing and it is irreversible. How we deal with it is made clear in the ICAO policy contained in the Declaration of global principles of the fifth Worldwide Air Transport Conference, held in 2003. It aims to create an environment in which international air transport may develop and flourish in a stable, efficient and economical manner without compromising safety or security and while respecting social and labour standards. The Declaration also promotes equality of opportunity, so that smaller carriers can be active in global markets without prejudice from larger, more dominant carriers.

Continuing global growth will create mounting pressure on us to maintain and improve on our capacity to deal effectively and in a timely manner with perennial areas of concern, the first one being, of course, aviation safety. Safety is the lifeblood of the global air transport industry. It is a fundamental concern we all have of saving and protecting the lives of passengers, crews, and persons on the ground. Without the excellent safety record that we have worked 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 and resilient air transport industry.

As I mentioned, a few days ago, I took part in the third Annual Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) International Safety Forum. The theme of this symposium was *Safety From Top to Bottom*. It prompted me to say that to maintain and improve on the remarkable safety record of aviation, we need a 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.

Safety lies 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.

After more than 40 years in national and international civil aviation, I am convinced that many accidents would not have occurred if the ICAO SARPs contained in the Annexes had 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 eminent 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, including five LACAC members, have authorized ICAO to publish the information on audits carried out in their territory and summary reports can now be consulted online.

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 by means of regional or sub-regional safety oversight organizations.

Liberalization, globalization and privatization of the industry are making it 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 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 the possibility of implementing safety management systems to complement the existing regulatory structure. We encourage them to do so. We have developed standards and related guidance material for establishing safety management systems, for aircraft operations, air traffic services, and aerodromes, as well as model legislation to make it easier to implement SMS. We believe it is the way of the future.

Global cooperation is essential if we are to successfully meet the tremendous challenges that lie ahead. Aviation security is also essential. The thwarted terrorist plot in the United Kingdom last August, potentially involving liquids used as explosives, evinced the vulnerability of the global air transport system and the need for constant vigilance. Because the threat is global, aviation security requires international cooperation. No aircraft operator is beyond threat. Because of this, cooperation, sharing of information, and practical and lasting measures are essential to maintaining aviation security and the public's trust.

ICAO took quick action in the United Kingdom case mentioned. The Council called on the Organization's Aviation Security (AVSEC) Panel meeting of 11 to 15 September to give highest priority to dealing with the threat. At this meeting, it was agreed that the panel members would study the possibility of developing a new list of items passengers are prohibited from bringing on board commercial aircraft, which, if germane to the matter, will be reviewed by the Council later this month.

In order to maintain its leadership in the world aviation community, 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.

Concretely, our intention is to focus on fulfilling our responsibilities as the world organization mandated in the following key areas:

- the global implementation of safety management systems designed to achieve measurable results;
- 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.

In international organizations such as ICAO, cooperation is the very foundation for our actions to be successful.

I foresee the growing importance of regional bodies and the functions of ICAO regional offices in the Organization's priority activities.

I wish to invite LACAC to bear firmly in mind, when carrying out its activities, the areas which we have considered to be of outstanding importance, such as safety and security, unified strategy, the complex issues relating to the environment, language proficiency, and all those areas in which training plays a fundamental role.

I believe that the participation and cooperation of regional bodies, such as LACAC, with ICAO, with other regions, and with interested States, will bear excellent fruit, leading to the achievement of greater safety and more efficiency in air transport, which will contribute to the development of our nations.

Ladies and gentlemen, I thank you for your kind attention and I wish you a most successful Assembly.