



**Address by the President of the Council
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Roberto Kobeh González,
to the 19th Plenary Session of the
African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC)**

(Nairobi, Kenya, 19 July 2007)

I am very happy to be here with you for the 19th Plenary of AFCAC and to say a few words on a subject I consider of the highest importance – political will and the improvement of aviation safety.

Two weeks ago, I was in Indonesia to sign on behalf of ICAO a Declaration by which that country commits to taking strong action in two areas - the creation of a robust safety oversight structure and the implementation of a proactive and systemic management of safety throughout its air transport system. I met with Indonesian President Yudhoyono who conveyed to me his deep understanding of the issues facing aviation in his country and his equally deep resolve to address the deficiencies as quickly as possible. I assured President Yudhoyono that he could count on the full support of ICAO and that ICAO is committed to exercising its leadership so that safety standards are implemented and enforced in all Member States. I also emphasized that ICAO can fulfil its mandate only if Member States assume their individual and collective responsibilities to maintain the safety of international civil aviation.

I would add that the world aviation community is in a similar position. Over the past year, I have had discussions with all major international aviation organizations and I can assure you that the willingness to support well planned and well-executed safety initiatives is real. At the same time, the aviation community needs assurances from States that require assistance, whether in Indonesia, Africa or anywhere else around the world, that they will do their share to improve safety.

This convergence of views between ICAO and the aviation community is reflected in the ICAO Global Aviation Safety Plan or GASP. The GASP is a performance-based approach which focuses energies and resources on activities that provide the highest return for increasing safety. An important characteristic of the GASP is that it incorporates the Global Aviation Safety Roadmap developed by members of the air transport industry, in consultation with ICAO safety specialists. The Roadmap was the first joint effort by governments and industry to develop a unified and coordinated approach to reducing accident rates, particularly in developing regions of the world. It also provides a common frame of reference for all stakeholders to coordinate and guide safety policy and initiatives. One could say that the two documents are practically the same.

The basic premise of the GASP is that optimal safety requires the consistent implementation and enforcement of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs), as well as industry best practices, in a consistent and systematic manner.

Of course, this needs to be supported by solid regulatory oversight. Under the Chicago Convention, each State has the authority and the responsibility to objectively evaluate any given safety-critical aviation activity within its jurisdiction. States must also ensure that the regulatory authority put in place for that purpose is independent, competent and adequately funded, and that there is an independent mechanism to monitor the competency of the regulatory authority.

In many cases, the human and financial resources needed are not available within a single State. The answer lies in the creation or strengthening of regional or sub-regional safety oversight organizations. This concept has worked extremely well in some parts of the world. Regional and sub-regional cooperation can be further enhanced through partnership initiatives with States, industry, air navigation service providers, financial institutions and other stakeholders. By working together in developing effective solutions to common problems, all parties will be in a better position to discharge their individual responsibilities and contribute to the overall improvement in aviation safety.

Transparency is another essential element of an effective safety oversight process. That is why the GASP encourages all Member States to share information and best practices on a continuous basis, on a regional basis and between regions. Equally important is the development of a just culture of reporting, where all safety-related issues can be shared and discussed openly, without fear of reprimand. This is one of the primary means available to industry to understand where hazards lie within an organization. There is much to be gained by an exchange of experience, and solutions at the regional level and efforts by all parties to improve safety at the local, State and regional levels are more effective at a global level if they are well aligned and based on shared goals and methods.

The Global Aviation Safety Plan contains many more measures to help reach and maintain optimal levels of aviation safety, including Safety Management Systems, or SMS, the most effective way of responding to the need for results-based supervision of personnel and functions with a relatively small workforce. All of these are complemented by recent developments such as the Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Aviation Safety in Africa outlined by the Secretary General of ICAO, Dr. Taïeb Chérif, at the opening of this meeting. Another is the new Implementation Support and Development Branch (ISD) created within ICAO to facilitate and coordinate safety and security assistance provided by States, industry, international financial institutions and other stakeholders. There is also the long-standing Technical Co-operation Programme of the Organization which has already made significant contributions to the development of air transport on the continent.

Above all, I want to reiterate that the most effective way to deal with problems, whether technical, operational or political, is through cooperation among all stakeholders. This must be supported by a strong political will on the part of States to bring their safety record to world standards. Political will also applies to members of the international community, who must likewise commit to assistance where there has been a clear demonstration of willingness to move ahead.

In short ladies and gentlemen, everything is in place for sustained improvements in aviation safety in Africa. The plan has been clearly stated, the intent to help clearly communicated, and the resources clearly identified. What is now required is a clear signal on the part of African States and aviation organizations that they are willing to work with their global partners to ensure that every passenger flying African skies can do so with confidence that he or she will get to destination safely.

As President of the Council of ICAO, I commit my own time and energy to this cause. I know I speak for all 36 Council Representatives when I say that ICAO is at your disposal to transform your respective civil aviation organizations, so that they can effectively meet the many challenges that lie ahead. I look forward to meeting many of you at the special meeting convened for 17 September at ICAO Headquarters, on the eve of the opening of the 36th Session of the ICAO Assembly. Our objective will be to draft a Declaration that will formalize this expression of global cooperation for lasting improvements to aviation safety in Africa.

The Assembly itself will be another opportunity to address the many challenges that Africa and the rest of world face in arriving at optimal safety in all regions. We will be able to build on Resolution A35-7 of the previous Assembly for a unified strategy to resolve safety-related deficiencies, as well as other safety initiatives that have been taken over the past three years.

In closing, I would like to acknowledge the great contribution of Mr. Tshepo Peege to the cause of civil aviation in Africa during his mandate as President of AFCAC and to assure his successor of the Council's continued support and cooperation.

It is vital that Africa takes its rightful place in the global marketplace. The Preamble to the Chicago Convention is clear in calling for international air transport services established on the basis of equality. But air transport can only deliver on its potential as a powerful driver of economic, social and cultural development if it is operated in a safe, secure, efficient and sustainable manner. The Convention, its Annexes and Assembly Resolutions are the flight plan for getting there. Working as partners, we can take Africa to greater heights. I look forward to making the journey with you.