



**Address by the President of the Council
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Roberto Kobeh González,
to the High-level meeting on a Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan
for Aviation Safety in Africa**

(Montreal, 17 September 2007)

I would like to thank all of you for having accepted our invitation to this *High-level meeting on a Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Aviation Safety in Africa*. During the course of the day, we will refer to this initiative as the AFI Plan.

The AFI Plan represents the most coordinated and inclusive effort ever developed to deal with the very serious safety challenges facing Africa. It is perhaps the best chance ever to correct an enduring problem that is impeding growth in Africa and preventing most African States from taking an active role in the global marketplace. Air travel is a powerful driver of economic and social development. The AFI Plan is an opportunity for Africa to fully reap these benefits.

As you will discover over the course of the day, ICAO is deeply committed to this Plan, but it can only succeed with a corresponding level of commitment on the part of States to implement the Plan and tangible expressions of support from industry and major stakeholders.

I want to stress that some States are doing well and have been able to focus their energies and resources on creating a safe, secure and efficient air transport system, but they are the exception. The overall level of aviation safety in Africa is getting worse and there is a growing body of evidence to prove the validity of this assertion.

We know that the rate of accidents in Africa is the highest in the world. The results of the safety oversight audits carried out by ICAO clearly indicate that while a number of States are meeting minimum safety standards, the majority are not, sometimes in spite of well-intended technical assistance. There have also been a number of separate reports with a similar conclusion.

Clearly, the situation is not going unnoticed. Something must be done, not only to protect the lives of African citizens, but to build a lucrative tourism industry and develop other business opportunities with the rest of world. International tourists and business people will only fly to Africa if they have confidence in your airlines and facilities.

ICAO is determined to play an increasingly proactive role in raising the level of safety in Africa. In fact, the Chicago Convention gives the Organization the responsibility and the power to take action against those States that do not meet the minimum standards contained in the Annexes or do not comply with the provisions of the Convention itself. One problem which has led to a number of accidents in Africa and the loss of many lives is the practice of flags of convenience. The issue of granting operating certificates to unsafe airlines is another. These and other such practices must stop.

The ICAO Council is wholeheartedly behind a more proactive approach and has already initiated action under Article 54 j) of the Convention in the case of three States in relation to their failure to carry out recommendations or determinations of the Council.

A growing emphasis on transparency was evident at the *Directors General of Civil Aviation Conference on a Global Strategy for Aviation Safety* held in March 2006 at ICAO. Participants unanimously agreed to post results of the ICAO safety oversight audit programme on the Organization's public website. This should encourage States to correct more quickly the safety deficiencies that remain in their aviation systems, while making it easier for States and donors to provide more rapid and more effective assistance to those that require much-needed financial or human resources. Because States that do not give their consent by March of next year will see their names published by ICAO, I urge them to comply as soon as possible. There should be no doubt in anyone's mind that full transparency is just around the corner.

Having said all of this, the role of ICAO is first and foremost to help States improve their aviation systems. That is our fundamental mandate contained in Article 44 of the Chicago Convention, which calls on the Organization to ensure the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation.

That is the reason we are all here today – to review the potential of the AFI Plan as a means to that end in Africa. I am encouraged by the number of people attending this meeting and I take it as a sign of your willingness to move forward to improve safety in your respective countries.

The Plan flows from an exploratory visit to Africa in 2006 by Members of ICAO's Air Navigation Commission. The Commission recommended a revitalization of ICAO's involvement in Africa in an effort, with all stakeholders, to reduce the accident rate and increase the overall level of safety. Under the direction of the Council and with the assistance and guidance of States and industry groups concerned, the ICAO Secretariat developed a Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Africa.

The AFI Plan is based on a holistic approach. It calls for greater coordination of ICAO safety-related programmes and projects with those of national and regional organizations in Africa, as well as international bodies concerned.

Above all perhaps, it reflects ICAO's overall strategy and methodology contained in the performance-based Global Aviation Safety Plan of the Organization and the industry Global Aviation Safety Roadmap. Both documents have been integrated and focus on activities with the highest return for improving safety. The AFI Plan is in line with this concept and is based on a programme management approach which will include the identification of risks, development of prioritized recommended actions, and continuous monitoring and evaluation. It will stress clearly defined objectives, outputs, activities and metrics. Accountability will become the overall consideration at every stage.

I am pleased to report that the response to the Plan has been very positive. As we put it into motion, we will be able to draw upon expertise available from ICAO Headquarters and its Regional Offices in Africa, the AFI Planning and Implementation Regional Group (APIRG), other Contracting States, ICAO partners such as the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA), the International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations (IFATCA) and other stakeholders, including international funding agencies such as the World Bank and the African Development Bank. The Plan will also be integrated with the ongoing Cooperative Development of Operational Safety and Continuing Airworthiness Programme (COSCAP) and the Implementation Support and Development (ISD) safety-related activities.

Of course, not all States have the requisite human, technical and financial resources to adequately perform safety oversight. This situation can be effectively addressed, I believe, with the creation of regional and sub-regional safety oversight organizations, where States pool their resources and together develop specific solutions to common problems. This can lead to considerable economies of scale and make it easier for all States to discharge their responsibilities for safety oversight. The regional approach has worked very well in other parts of the world and I am sure it can be as successful in Africa.

A cooperative strategy can also involve partnership initiatives with other States, industry, air navigation service providers, financial institutions and other stakeholders. But I must emphasize, partners and donors will only commit to such an undertaking if they are assured that it will lead to significant, concrete safety improvements. There has to be a clear demonstration of political willingness on the part of States to carry out agreed-upon activities and programmes.

ICAO has always promoted a policy of reinvesting revenues derived from user charges back into the local civil aviation infrastructure and that, ultimately, the systems should be self-financing. I recommend that this be an objective for all States. Donors would be much more interested to contribute if this policy was carried out.

Today, you will have the opportunity to accelerate this process by demonstrating your commitment to a proposed draft Assembly Resolution calling for voluntary contributions to assist with the implementation of the Plan. I urge you to show your full support for this Resolution.

In closing, I would like to mention once again that the AFI Plan will only succeed with the political will of States and the enthusiastic, tangible support of industry and donors. In the end, this Plan is Africa's Plan. It is your Plan. It was created with your help, to solve your problems, and will only work if you make it yours.