



**OPENING ADDRESS BY THE
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO),
MR. ROBERTO KOBEH GONZÁLEZ,
TO THE ICAO AIR TRANSPORT SYMPOSIUM**

(Abuja, Nigeria - 28 April 2008)

I would like to welcome you to this latest ICAO Air Transport Symposium for African States and to thank the Honourable Minister of State for his kind invitation to address this meeting and for the warm welcome extended to us by our host, the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority. On behalf of the Council of ICAO, I would also like to express our gratitude to the Government of Nigeria for its long-standing cooperation and ongoing support of ICAO's work over the years.

The objective of this Symposium is twofold: it serves to introduce participants to the latest developments in ICAO's work, and it provides a forum to address current issues of interest to the aviation community. Among the topics for discussion this time are regulation and liberalization of air transport, management and economics of airports and air navigation services, economic analyses and databases, and environmental protection.

The presence here today of so many key representatives from States, international and regional organizations, Directors General of Civil Aviation and Representatives on the Council of ICAO highlights the importance we all attach to these subjects. We are, after all, talking about the future of air transport in Africa.

I believe it is a bright future. Air transport on the continent holds tremendous potential for growth and economic development by fostering trade and foreign investments, yet at the moment it remains relatively small compared to those of other continents, with about two per cent of global passenger and freight traffic. The challenge lies in bridging the gap between the realities of today and the promises of tomorrow.

Part of the answer involves the progressive, systematic and harmonized liberalization of the air transport sector throughout Africa, as captured by the Yamoussoukro Decision of 1999. Since that time, there has been an acceleration of liberalization in many parts of the world. As of today, more than 142 open skies bilateral agreements have been concluded involving 91 countries and territories. Liberalization at the regional and sub-regional levels is also gaining ground, with no less than 11 regional or sub-regional agreements now in operation, including four in the African Region. Still, Africa lags behind and must expedite the full implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision. I must say that the consistent and enthusiastic cooperation among States that we have witnessed recently suggests that a liberalized aviation environment can and will emerge on the continent.

Another essential condition for growth is safety. Safety is at the heart of the mission of ICAO, as I am sure it is a constant preoccupation of aviation authorities throughout Africa. Growing cooperation between ICAO and Member States, together with industry stakeholders, has resulted in considerable improvements to safety levels over the past few years and the latest collaborative initiative should lead to even more rapid progress in the short to medium term. I am referring of course to the Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Aviation Safety in Africa, also known as the AFI Plan. The AFI Plan was created by ICAO and endorsed by the African aviation community and all major world aviation organizations. It is, in effect, Africa's Plan and it goes right to the root of the problem.

For example, many well-intentioned efforts over the years were either too often uncoordinated or perhaps insufficient and inappropriate. The AFI Plan corrects the trajectory by adopting the strategy and methodology contained in ICAO's performance-based Global Aviation Safety Plan and the industry's Global Aviation Safety Roadmap, developed in cooperation with ICAO. Both documents are fully integrated and concentrate on activities with the highest return for improving safety. The result is a disciplined, programme management approach that permeates every aspect of the AFI Plan. It stresses clearly defined objectives, outputs, activities and metrics. Accountability is the overall consideration at every stage. The AFI Plan also promotes greater coordination of ICAO safety-related programmes and projects with those of national and regional bodies in Africa, as well as international organizations concerned.

I am happy to report that implementation of the AFI Plan is well under way. Late last year, the ICAO Council approved the funds for the first phase of the project. We created the AFI Comprehensive Implementation Programme, or ACIP and established a highly representative Steering Committee composed of nine States, including five from Africa, the African Union, the African Civil Aviation Commission, the African Development Bank, the European Commission, the Industry Safety Strategy Group and the World Bank. The Committee held its first meeting in February and the second one is planned for October.

The ACIP will focus on three broad areas: enable States to establish and maintain a sustainable safety oversight system; assist them in resolving deficiencies identified through safety oversight activities; and enhance the safety culture of the entire air transport system.

ICAO is deeply committed to the AFI Plan, at Headquarters and through the Regional Offices. By working together, we will succeed in substantially improving safety in Africa.

As we move in that direction, we must ensure the efficient management of airports and air navigation services, within a rapidly evolving regulatory and economic context. This is not an easy task. ICAO itself realized that its policies needed to be reviewed and updated, and decided to convene a Conference on the Economics of Airports and Air Navigation Services from 15 to 20 September 2008 in Montreal.

With the cooperation of Member States, ICAO developed comprehensive policies and guidance material over the years on charges for airports and air navigation services. These policies can greatly assist in supporting efforts of States towards greater commercialization and privatization, particularly in dealing with changes in governance, ownership and control of airports and air navigation services providers.

I urge you all to attend the Conference in September and to contribute your experience and voice your requirements as we update our charging policies related to economic oversight, economic and management performance, consultation with users, transparency and the cost relationship of charges. You will not only enhance the range of policies available to the world aviation community, but also increase your own ability to adapt these universal principles to your particular circumstances.

My final comment this morning deals with the environment, specifically climate change. This is an issue which concerns us all, whether here in Africa or in any other part of the world, and regardless of the size of the air transport sector. It is a very complex challenge, involving a number of inter-connected technical, operational, economic, social and political factors which we will be discussing later in the Symposium. To help us along, I thought I would brief you on a few recent developments.

As you know, the 36th Session of the ICAO Assembly called for the formation of a new group to develop and recommend to ICAO an aggressive Programme of Action on International Aviation and Climate Change, based upon consensus and reflective of the shared vision and determination of all Contracting States to deal with climate change. The terms of reference of this

high-level group known as the Group on International Aviation and Climate Change, or GIACC, are to develop an implementation framework, identify a means to measure progress, identify possible aspirational goals, and report progress resulting from actions implemented by Contracting States and Stakeholders.

GIACC is composed of senior government officials representative of all ICAO regions, with the equitable participation of developing and developed States. There are two members from Africa, Dr. Harold Olusegun Demuren, Director General and Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, and Ms. Mpumi Mpofu, Director General in the Department of Transport of South Africa. GIACC held its first meeting a few weeks ago in Montréal and the next one is planned for July. In all, four meetings are planned, following which the Council of ICAO will convene a high-level meeting to review the Programme of Action recommended by GIACC. The Assembly requested that this high-level meeting be convened at an appropriate time, taking into account the fact that the fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15) of the UNFCCC will be held in December 2009.

I had the pleasure of opening the first meeting of the GIACC and I can assure you that all Group Members appreciate the trust placed in them, recognize the enormous responsibility that rests on their shoulders, and are committed to working together in a spirit of cooperation.

To sum up, the flight plan for growth and prosperity in African skies rests on the effective liberalization of the air transport industry, coupled with enhanced safety, efficiency and sustainability of operations. Above all is the requirement for cooperation. All that I have described above cannot be achieved alone. Many States do not have the financial or human resources required. Often the answer lies in pooling resources through regional or sub-regional organizations. ASECNA and other bodies like it are good examples of what is possible when intentions are matched with determination and hard work.

Africa is demonstrating political will and determination in creating a sound air transport industry and infrastructure. It recognizes the tremendous economic and social benefits for improving the well-being of every African citizen, to opening up the world to them, and Africa to the world. Let us take advantage of this ICAO Air Transport Symposium to move one step closer to meeting that objective.