



**Address by the President of the Council of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Roberto Kobeh González,
to the Thirty-first Plenary Session
of the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC)**

(Strasbourg, 7 July 2009)

It is a distinct pleasure for me to say a few words before the Thirty-first Plenary Session of the European Civil Aviation Conference.

Before I begin, and on behalf of the Council and the Secretariat of ICAO, I would like to express my sincere condolences to the families of passengers and crew who perished in the recent accidents of Air France flight 447 and Yemenia Air flight 626. These unfortunate events are tragic reminders of our common mission to do all we can to ensure the ongoing safety of civil aviation.

Your meeting today and tomorrow takes place within the context of a major global recession that continues to exert enormous pressure on the air transport industry, in Europe and around the world. ICAO's most recent traffic report highlights the magnitude of the crisis – airlines in 2008 posted collectively the slowest rate of growth since 2002. The report also points out, however, that signs of stabilization have emerged and that further improvements are expected for the rest of the year. With similar encouraging news on the economic front, we remain on course for air transport recovery in 2010.

I am happy to see the presence here of all ECAC sister regional organizations and other prestigious stakeholders from Europe and elsewhere. The integrity of national, regional and global air transport systems thrives on the exchange of views, best practices and forward-looking concepts. I am sure that we will all benefit from the opportunity to tap into such collective wisdom, experience and imagination. In that spirit, and with your indulgence, I would like to briefly outline the perspective of ICAO in addressing today's pressing aviation challenges, in the hope that my comments may provide food for thought for your discussions.

ICAO's strategy can be summarized by saying that we are intensifying our transition to a performance-driven and results-based Organization. This was undertaken in a systematic fashion with the approval of the Organization's Business Plan for 2008 to 2010. For the first time, we produced a results-based budget based on the development of a comprehensive work programme. The emphasis on performance planning and decision-making is designed to make us increasingly responsive and relevant to our Member States and major aviation stakeholders around the world.

This fundamental shift in thinking was applied to all key sectors of activity. In safety, we now more than ever focus our attention on those sectors which provide the greatest potential for return on the investment of human and financial resources – this includes runway incursions, wind shear, the protection of data collection and strengthening of the global regulatory framework, to name but a few. We are actively promoting State Safety Programmes and Safety Management Systems as a way to reinforce a culture of safety throughout civil aviation administrations and industry. We are in the process of transitioning from our current Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) to a Continuous Monitoring Approach (CMA), to track progress and areas of concern alike in a more timely and effective manner.

Our shift in thinking has also brought us to concentrate on specific problem areas and regions of the world, where systemic technical, operational and regulatory problems linger. By emphasizing a programme management concept with local and regional organizations and partners, we can bring about substantive improvements and significantly reduce the rate of accidents. In short, we are moving from the traditional post-accident approach to a pre-emptive, prognostic approach.

Security has been addressed much in the same way, in recognition of the growing pressures on States to implement stringent security processes, while expediting a growing number of passengers and cargo at airports in such a way as to not compromise operations. We need more responsive and globally coordinated action to threats, as was taken in response to the planned terrorist plot against civil aircraft over the North Atlantic three years ago, almost to the day.

That event led to restrictions on the carriage in the cabin of liquids, aerosols and gels, known as (LAGs), measures that quickly became a source of concern and annoyance for airport and airline operators, concession owners, and travellers. We must now deal as effectively with the consequences as with the threat itself. ICAO's Aviation Security Panel is currently activating the process aimed at minimizing the impact of restrictions on LAGs, in cooperation with governments and industry partners. Together, we are evaluating the effectiveness and practicalities of new screening technologies and procedures to detect liquids, aerosols and sprays that could be used as explosives. It is hoped that new measures could be introduced as early as next year.

As we deal with these and other security measures, we should also consider the social dimension of such initiatives, such as complaints over invasion of privacy or intrusive screening technologies. Again, focused, collaborative action will be essential.

As we know, both aviation safety and security can be greatly enhanced through improved efficiency of the air navigation system. On a global scale, we therefore need to accelerate the ICAO Global Air Navigation Plan, which calls for an interoperable and seamless global air traffic management (ATM) system – one that applies to all users, during all phases of flight, and that meets agreed levels of safety, provides for optimum economic operations, is environmentally sustainable and meets national security requirements.

I was pleased to see at a forum held last year at ICAO that both Europe's SESAR and the US NextGen air traffic management systems are consistent with the global ATM framework. This will contribute to optimum safety, security, efficiency and sustainability of flight operations worldwide. It will also support ICAO's commitment to adapting its systems and procedures to the evolving needs of the aviation community and to promoting efficiency of operations through flexible, harmonized technologies and procedures where needed. The implementation of Single European Sky regulations, recognized by the 11th Air Navigation Conference, will further move the process along.

This having been said, there is perhaps no other area where we need more cooperation than in dealing with one of the greatest challenges we face, not only as an industry but as a global society – the threat posed by climate change.

The stake in the ground at the moment is the report of the ICAO Group on International Aviation and Climate Change (GIACC) reviewed and approved by the Council of ICAO last week. The GIACC was called for by the ICAO Assembly in 2007 to propose an aggressive plan of action on climate change and aviation. It did just that with, amongst other items, a 60% improvement in fuel efficiency of aircraft involved in international aviation by the year 2050, from a 2005 base level. The plan also features a basket of measures to help those States requiring assistance in achieving the recommended goals, such as aircraft-related technology development – including advances in aircraft design as well as the development of “drop-in” biofuels to replace fossil-based fuels; improved air traffic management and infrastructure use; more efficient operations; economic or market-based measures; and regulatory measures.

The report will be reviewed at a high-level meeting convened by ICAO in October. The results of that meeting are expected to form the basis of the international aviation community’s position at the Copenhagen climate change talks in December. I take this opportunity to thank the European members of the GIACC for their contribution to an exercise designed to firmly establish ICAO as the proper body to manage greenhouse gas emissions from international aviation.

Ladies and gentlemen, in all of the initiatives and activities I have mentioned and many others, cooperation has been and remains the catalyst for effective and long-lasting results. Cooperation has also been the hallmark of the productive relationship between ICAO and ECAC for more than half a century now. From 1955 to this day, our two organizations have pursued similar goals, albeit at different levels, around a common cause — the safe and orderly growth of intentional civil aviation. Through the years, our relationship matured, and so did our commitment to ever-increasing cooperation and coordination in taking up these new and emerging challenges. Today, especially in a Europe that is being expanded and redefined, civil aviation must adapt rapidly and effectively to a constantly changing political, technological, economic and social environment.

We are fortunate that Mr. Raymond Benjamin will bring to his new position as Secretary General of ICAO beginning on 1 August, a deep understanding and sensitivity relative to the dynamics now unfolding throughout Europe. This will help us build on more recent initiatives such as those taken with the assistance of the European Commission. In the field of safety, a Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) between ICAO and the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) in 2006 paved the way for EASA to be audited under the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP). A similar MoC signed in 2008 strengthened mutual cooperation under the auspices of the ICAO Universal Security Audit Programme (USAP) whereby it now carries out assessments of the Commission’s Civil Aviation Security Inspection System. These two agreements are successful templates for avoiding duplication, decreasing the administrative burden on States and reducing pressure on limited resources.

As we can see, much can be achieved through cooperation. It is a concept that is as old as aviation itself, yet as young and vibrant as every new challenge that we face. And the best results often stem from the coming together of the greatest number of concerned stakeholders. And that is what ICAO is all about: a global forum dedicated to promoting international cooperation among all members of the world aviation community, where varied and sometimes diverging national interests can be considered and acted upon.

I thank you for your kind attention and wish you a most productive session.