



**Address by the President of the Council of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Roberto Kobeh González,
on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the ICAO Asia and Pacific Regional Office**

“Socio-Economic Dynamics of Civil Aviation in the Asia and Pacific Region”

(Bangkok, Thailand – 14 July 2009)

I am truly delighted to be here with you this morning and to share a few thoughts on the very interesting theme of this meeting, the *“Socio-Economic Dynamics of Civil Aviation in the Asia and Pacific Region”*.

Before I do so, I would like to take this opportunity to note the 60th anniversary of the ICAO Asia and Pacific Regional Office. The Regional Office was first established in Melbourne, in 1948, and moved to Bangkok in 1952 at the kind invitation of the Kingdom of Thailand. Thanks to the generosity of the Royal Thai Government, the Office has been well-equipped to fulfill its mandate of bringing together the 36 States to which it is accredited and international organizations located in the Region, with the objective of working together to promote safety, security, efficiency and environmental sustainability.

During that period, civil aviation grew exponentially, especially in more recent years. It has been a powerful catalyst for socio-economic growth, sustaining millions of direct and indirect jobs and billions of dollars in terms of gross domestic product (GDP). ICAO is proud to have contributed to this extraordinary collective achievement, much of that work performed through the Regional Office in Bangkok. The challenge is now for the Organization to assist aviation stakeholders in promoting the continued growth and integrity of air transport.

Growth may not be the first word that comes to mind these days. ICAO's traffic report and forecast issued recently shows that carriers in 2008 posted the slowest rate of growth since 2002. For the Asia and Pacific Region, no growth was recorded for international passenger traffic and the 3.7 % growth in domestic traffic was achieved mainly due to a 6% growth by air carriers of China.

There is, however, room for cautious optimism linked to the improving economy. A moderate recovery in traffic is forecast for 2010, with a positive growth rate of about 3.3% and the momentum should continue in 2011 with a growth of 5.5%. For the Asia and Pacific Region, the forecast is higher than the world average, at 3.6% growth in 2010 and 6.5% in 2011.

This raises an important issue: we can either resume a 'business as usual approach' or we can adopt a more proactive, innovative strategy on the road to recovery. For us, the choice was clear — to push ahead with the transformation of ICAO into a performance-driven and results-based Organization. We believe that performance planning and decision-making will make us more responsive and more valuable to our Member States, here and around the world.

You may ask what this means in practical terms. Allow me to illustrate with reference to the main spheres of ICAO activity.

In the area of safety, we are focusing more than ever on activities with the greatest potential for return on the investment of resources. This means adopting a comprehensive and integrated approach to safety, which takes into account economic, social and geopolitical realities. It also implies going to the root of the problem and producing concrete and lasting results.

This has brought us to act in specific regions or countries of the world, where systemic technical, operational and regulatory problems linger. A good example is Indonesia, which country I visited in November 2008 to discuss with local political and aviation officials how we could best address major weaknesses in the air transport system. I was very encouraged by their commitment to upgrade facilities and streamline safety-critical operations. Next month, we will be sending a validation mission to assess progress made and to identify further action required, if any. This kind of collaborative undertaking can help States rebuild confidence of the international community and contribute to enhanced socio-economic benefits from aviation.

There is also the proposal for the establishment of Regional Safety Groups to address flight safety issues from a broader, multinational perspective. Regionalism is a time-tested concept that has been improving air transport in Africa, Latin America and elsewhere. Pooling resources is often the only viable option for smaller or less-developed States to meet enormous aviation-related challenges.

Aviation security is another sector where more responsive and coordinated action is needed. Governments are responsible for maintaining a delicate balance between implementing security processes and expediting the clearance of passengers and cargo at airports without compromising the efficiency of operations. This is not always easy. One example involves the measures imposed to deal with carry-on liquids, aerosols and gels (LAGs). These measures are a source of concern and annoyance for airport operators, concessions and travelers alike. ICAO's Aviation Security Panel is currently activating the process aimed at removing the 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.

Obviously, both aviation safety and security rely on the efficiency of the air transport system. With the return to growth next year, airport and airspace congestion will gradually return to the top of the agenda, most notably in the Asia and Pacific Region. Here and elsewhere, we need to accelerate the implementation of the ICAO Global Air Navigation Plan which calls for an interoperable and seamless global air traffic management (ATM) system.

We also need to invest massively in airport and air traffic control facilities to cope with the anticipated increase in flights and passengers. The Asia and Pacific Region understands this and has built some of the most efficient and striking airports anywhere, with plans for regional and international airports to meet demand.

Of major concern to me is the anticipated shortage of skilled personnel resulting primarily from massive retirements and the further specialization of functions. The economic slowdown has provided some breathing space, but we must act now. ICAO is currently planning a symposium for March of next year that will look into a plan of action on meeting the evolving training needs of States and industry stakeholders. This will culminate in a report to the 37th Session of the ICAO Assembly later in the year on a global strategy for ensuring an adequate level of skilled aviation professionals.

For those of you less familiar with ICAO, an Assembly illustrates perfectly well what the Organization is all about – a global forum for 190 Member States and observer stakeholders to adjust the course for the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation. This process also takes place in ICAO conferences, such as the Conference on the Economics of Airports and Air Navigation Services (CEANS) held in September 2008.

The reason I mention this Conference in particular is that it resulted in a very productive review of economic policies that will impact the evolution of the air transport industry. Included are fundamental principles such as non-discrimination, cost-relatedness, transparency and consultation with users. Others extend to protection of passenger interests, more flexibility for commercialized airports and air navigation service providers in setting charges, the separation of regulatory responsibility from service provision and the application of good governance. All are intended to bring about closer cooperation among industry stakeholders, while increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of airport operations and the provision of air navigation services.

The last point I wish to cover today is the environment, or more precisely climate change. This may be the greatest challenge we have ever faced, not only as an economic sector, but as a global society. It is a dual challenge – to reduce greenhouse gas producing emissions and to counter negative public perception despite our remarkable achievements over the past four decades.

The report of the ICAO Group on International Aviation and Climate Change (GIACC) issued a few weeks ago should contribute to meeting that challenge effectively. The GIACC was created by the ICAO Assembly in 2007 to propose an aggressive plan of action on climate change and it did just that, including a 60% improvement in fuel efficiency of aircraft involved in international aviation by the year 2050, from a 2005 base level. It 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” bio fuels to replace fossil-based fuels; improved air traffic management and infrastructure use; more efficient operations; economic/market-based measures; and regulatory measures.

The report was approved by the Council of ICAO and will be reviewed at a high-level meeting convened by ICAO on the subject next 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.

Ladies and gentlemen, all of these actions and others that ICAO has taken in consort with its Member States and the aviation community flow from a common vision — that international air transport services may be established on the basis of equality of opportunity and operated soundly and economically. Those words are contained in the preamble to the Chicago Convention, the charter of ICAO written in 1944. And, I could add, so that the socio-economic benefits of air transport are accessible to as many of the world’s inhabitants as possible.

I thank you for your kind attention.