



**Opening address by the President of the Council of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to the
High-level Safety Conference**

(Montreal, 29 March 2010)

I am delighted to welcome all of you to this High-level Safety Conference.

I view this conference as the third in a series of ground-breaking meetings to fundamentally overhaul the way in which we manage safety issues globally.

The first was the Directors General of Civil Aviation Conference of 1997 which established USOAP – ICAO’s mandatory Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP). The creation of USOAP was a paradigm shift in attitudes and policies; for the first time, sovereign States authorized a United Nations agency to assess their respective capabilities to oversee the implementation of agreed-upon international standards on their territory.

The second was the 2006 DGCA Conference when participants agreed to post USOAP results on ICAO’s public website. This was tacit recognition that transparency and sharing of information are fundamental to a safe air transport system. It was not an easy decision, but it was certainly the right thing to do.

This focus of this week’s conference is the sharing of safety information – an essential element in our global safety strategy. We must build on the concept of transparency and demonstrate our capability to work together as never before, to achieve additional improvements in safety where they are most needed.

It begins with taking stock of the current situation. While the number of fatal accidents and associated fatalities has consistently dropped over the past decade or so, despite an increase in traffic, the gap in safety results has widened between certain States and regions.

Our task now is to develop and implement more flexible and effective strategies to help States with specific challenges in reducing their accident rates and contribute to an even safer global air transport system, while reinforcing safety in others.

This means agreeing on new strategies for managing safety and complementing our traditional prescriptive-based methodology with a proactive, performance-based approach better equipped to reduce accident rates from their present levels.

This new way of doing business will allow proactive identification and response to emerging safety issues before they result in accidents or incidents.

Worldwide, Safety Management Systems and newly-created State Safety Programmes are being implemented. ICAO programmes have adapted. A Continuous Monitoring Approach for USOAP encourages a more effective and efficient use of resources in assessing State compliance with ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices. These innovations and trends are fundamental building blocks of ICAO's evolving safety strategy and will provide increasing benefits as they continue to mature.

Yes, ICAO has irrevocably embraced the risk-based approach, at the same time recognizing that this requires an equivalent commitment to risk-management. At an organizational level, for ICAO, for States and for aviation organizations, we must all adjust the way in which we respond to risk through our respective safety management processes.

By definition, proactive safety strategies to avert potential accidents cannot be based on simply reacting to serious events. We also need to fully understand the risks associated with the many facets of today's complex aviation system. And while vast amounts of data are regularly collected, the problem is that this information is not effectively shared. The time has come to ensure that all critical safety-related information is disseminated throughout the international aviation community and processed using globally harmonized analysis methods.

To that end, ICAO is currently developing an internal integrated safety trend analysis and reporting system that will eventually have the capability to analyze various types of data, thereby creating a multidimensional assessment of emerging safety issues.

The success of these efforts, however, will ultimately rest on policy decisions that facilitate the free exchange of information. Simply stated, the sharing of valuable safety information must become the norm, rather than an exceptional practice among States and concerned aviation stakeholders.

Obviously there are risks involved in the sharing of information. And so, it is essential that we establish an environment where the exchange of critical safety information can be encouraged and facilitated without jeopardizing information sources. Without such a protective environment, a proactive approach to safety will not be possible.

Another critical element of a sound proactive safety strategy is having the competencies needed for an effective safety oversight system. With State Safety Programmes at varying levels of maturity, we must be more creative and flexible in finding solutions tailored to each State's needs.

One option remains the tried-and-tested concept of Regional Safety Oversight Organizations which have demonstrated their ability to overcome many of the obstacles faced by States. Other alternatives include bilateral agreements or external service providers conducting technical work related to safety oversight. Whichever solution provides the best fit, in all cases States retain responsibility for safety oversight.

As you can see, there are a number of options to be considered as we continue to develop a global safety strategy. Nonetheless, we must always be cognizant of the fact that, despite our tireless efforts, a certain degree of risk is inherent to aviation operations. While all accidents are tragic, we must recognize the need for continued development of safety initiatives that prevent their recurrence.

These are just some of the issues that we will cover, not only in the next few days but also in the years to come. As was the case in 1997 and 2006, the time has come to take bold and difficult decisions, because it is the right thing to do for the aviation community.

In concrete terms, this is what I expect from the High-level Safety Conference:

1. Support for the transition in the near-term to the Continuous Monitoring Approach to safety oversight.

This will require your commitment to providing ICAO with accurate and complete information in a timely manner.

I also ask you to reaffirm your commitment to the transparency of USOAP audit results and to agree that this principle be applied to the issuance of significant safety concerns.

2. Support for the integration of State safety information through the harmonization of key safety metrics and the coordination of safety analysis methods.

In addition, the sharing of information from State safety analyses is essential to the success of a global safety strategy and I ask that when possible you make the required expertise available.

3. Affirmation of the role of Regional Safety Oversight Organizations.

These can help States in need to leverage limited resources and to obtain aggregate data for meaningful safety analyses.

4. Agreement on the development of a global organizational framework to protect the providers of sensitive safety data used for future information sharing initiatives.

Without this protective framework, essential information will remain unavailable to ICAO and to other organizations involved in the analysis and resolution of global safety issues.

Finally, I ask the Conference to consider the need for a dedicated Safety Management Annex.

This will require resources and therefore deserves careful consideration; however, a dedicated safety management Annex will highlight safety as ICAO's primary focus, relevant to all aviation professionals, regardless of their operational expertise. It will facilitate a coordinated approach for the promulgation of the practices necessary to assure the highest levels of safety throughout the international aviation system.

In closing, ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you for taking the time to attend this High-level Safety Conference. I believe it can rank as another milestone in our successful drive to provide the citizens of all Member States of ICAO, the people you represent, with the safest national, regional and global air transport systems possible. And we must achieve this, as we have always done, through our collective resolve to honour our commitments and to take all necessary action to ensure the continued successful evolution of a global safety strategy.