

**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE INTERNATIONAL
CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO), DR. ASSAD KOTAITE,
TO THE DIRECTORS GENERAL OF CIVIL AVIATION CONFERENCE
ON A GLOBAL STRATEGY FOR AVIATION SAFETY**

(Montreal, 20 March 2006)

On behalf of the Council and Secretary General of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), I have the honour to declare open this Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation (DGCA). I would like to extend a warm welcome to The Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities of Canada, and to all the participants to this Conference.

The purpose of the Conference is to reach consensus on a Global Strategy for Aviation Safety in the 21st century. While 2003 and 2004 were the safest years since the creation of ICAO in 1944, six major accidents in August and September of last year claimed more lives than in all of 2004. Those accidents were timely reminders that systemic deficiencies identified under the Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) since 1999 were still present. They also reminded us never to take aviation safety for granted. There is absolutely no room for complacency where safety is concerned, there never was and there never will be.

Public reaction reinforced the message. News reports showed people who sought answers to troubling questions and expressed anger at the lack of response from some authorities. Where Governments did implement measures intended to increase safety in their own airspace, their actions were not always understood or accepted by other States. If left unchecked, such misunderstandings could erode the very system that has supported the safe development of international civil aviation over the past 60 years. Directors General could argue with each other instead of relying on each other to improve safety.

That issue must be addressed squarely and decisively at this meeting. Aviation safety can only be achieved through a network of Directors General working as one. The strategy that you develop at this Conference must strengthen the system that binds you together. It must be a strategy that recognizes that a weakness in one is a weakness in all. And the thread that must run through this strategy is transparency. By being transparent and freely sharing information with each other and the public, you recapture the ability to act as one, to reinforce each others' actions, and to strengthen public confidence.

You will be better able to stand united against those who compromise aviation safety. It will help you to strengthen the process of recognition of foreign air operators and surveillance of their aircraft in your respective territories. A dangerous operator that escapes detection by one Director General can and should be controlled by another. In this battle, you are all allies on the side of safety.

Having said that, it is not enough to strengthen the system without strengthening the components of the system, that is to say the safety oversight capabilities of your respective administrations. This is particularly significant for Contracting States that lack the necessary human, technical or financial resources. DGCAs need to support one another, through the implementation of sustainable regional safety oversight organizations. These organizations can only be established by coordinated efforts from ICAO, States, industry and donors.

National civil aviation authorities, industry and funding institutions must cooperate fully in the provision of aviation technical assistance and guidance around the world. ICAO also stands ready to help in coordinating multilateral assistance when that is the preferred approach, so that States may build the required safety oversight capacity and implement safe practices throughout their air transport systems.

While safety oversight auditing can prove effective in identifying and promoting corrective action, it should not be seen as an end in itself. Equally important is the ability to bring about improvements. Resources allocated to audits and to remedies must be evaluated carefully; no disproportionate amount of resources should be allocated to auditing, at the expense of resources for safety enhancements.

Ladies and gentlemen, in a few months I will be retiring from ICAO after 53 years of service to this extraordinary Organization. Throughout my career, aviation safety has been my constant preoccupation. For me, one accident was always one too many, and the loss of even one life, was one too many. Like all of you here, I was entrusted with a noble mission, to protect the lives and well-being of the travelling public. We have done and must continue to do everything within our power to make sure they get to their destination safely and unharmed, and that no one on the ground will be killed or injured because of an aircraft accident.

You are the custodians of a powerful instrument of economic, social and cultural development for the citizens of your respective countries. You hold in your hands the tools that keep air transport safe and efficient for all those who fly on your airlines, who walk through your airports and who travel through your airspace.

Together, you form a global network. Together, you can save lives and give meaning to the vision of the Chicago Convention for a world aviation system that promotes peace and understanding among peoples and nations of the world. Together, you can create a global strategy for aviation safety that will be your legacy to the world for decades to come.

What we need is a strategy that propels us into action. I look forward to building this global strategy with you over the next few days.