

Innovative ICAO Conference facilitates Air Services Negotiations between States to enhance efficiency

The first ICAO Air Services Negotiation Conference (ICAN 2008), held in Dubai from November 24-27 2008, brought together air service negotiators representing 27 States from the African, Asia-Pacific, European, Middle Eastern and North American Regions for bilateral talks relating to their respective air service agreements. The event, which also attracted two international organizations, was hosted by the Dubai Civil Aviation Authority with the support of the Federal Government of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

This was the first such event to be organized by ICAO and it was designed to provide a central meeting or “marketplace” where government negotiators could meet and hold separate bilateral air service talks in a multilateral setting. Traditionally, each State would have to travel to each of its bilateral partner States to conduct such meetings.

By enabling each participating State to hold multiple negotiations at the same location, the Conference greatly improved the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall negotiation process. The ICAO Secretariat first put forward the “marketplace” concept during the Fifth Worldwide Air Transport Conference (ATConf/5) in 2003—as a means to assist States with the liberalization process. The Conference’s results clearly demonstrate that it has achieved its objectives.

“This is an historic event in that it is the first time since the introduction of the bilateral system for international air transport regulation that these many States have gathered in one place to conduct their respective bilateral air service negotiations,” stated the President of the ICAO Council, Roberto Kobeh González. “ICAO is best positioned to facilitate this process, and is proud to have brought this event to fruition. The Organization will continue to serve our Contracting States in a practical, effective, efficient and innovative way, as exemplified by ICAN2008.”

During the three days of ICAN2008, more than 100 formal and informal bilateral meetings were held (an average of 5 meetings for each delegation), and over 20 bilateral air service agreements or arrangements were concluded or signed. While some negotiations have yielded agreements,



The UAE's Director General for Dubai's Civil Aviation Authority, Mohammed Ahli (left), seen here with ICAO Air Transport Bureau Director, Folasade Odutola. Al Mansoori congratulated Ms. Odutola's Bureau for developing the concept of the ICAN Conference and helping to make it such a successful reality.

many other talks have helped open future opportunities for developing better aviation relations and air links between States.

The Conference also provided a forum, through its seminar session, for participants to exchange information and views on current trends and issues in liberalization and learn about related ICAO guidance. The delegates highly commended ICAO for this innovative initiative and indicated their strong support for future events of this kind.

“ICAO’s efforts have provided a convenient platform to facilitate countries like Singapore in pursuing for the liberalization of air services,” noted Lim Kim Choon, Director General and CEO of the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore. His country signed two separate open skies agreements with Romania and Zambia at the ICAN event.

Lim’s remarks were echoed by UAE Minister of the Economy, Sultan bin Saeed Al Mansoori. “This has truly been a conference with a difference,” Al Mansoori commented. “I wish to congratulate the ICAO Air Transport Bureau for developing this idea and helping to make it such a successful reality.” ■