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WORKING PAPER

ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION

TECHNICAL COMMISSION

Agenda Item 24: Aviation Safety and Air Navigation Priority Initiatives

DRIVING SAFETY: ENHANCING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORT PUBLICATION AND MECHANISMS

(Presented by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), International Coordinating Council of Aerospace Industries Associations (ICCAIA), and International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Association (IFALPA))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The timely publication of final reports following aircraft accident investigations is a fundamental requirement under ICAO Annex 13 — *Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation*.

The Fourteenth Air Navigation Conference (AN-Conf/14) recognized the risk to the global aviation system when safety lessons learned from investigations are not applied in a timely manner. Between 2018-2023, as presented in the IATA Annual Safety Report, out of the 269 accidents classified by the IATA Accident Classification Task Force (ACTF), 57 per cent resulted in a final report.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

a) urge ICAO to promote greater compliance with Annex 13 — *Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation* by calling on all States to fully implement its provisions, including the strict adherence to timelines set forth therein, to ensure the mandatory and timely publication of comprehensive, high-quality final reports;
b) urge ICAO to actively encourage States lacking the required capacity to conduct an aircraft accident investigation to enhance their own expertise or, where resources are limited, seek support through partnership with regional safety organizations, to meet their obligations under Annex 13;
c) request that ICAO consistently require States' investigation authorities to develop and sustain competencies through a dedicated accident investigation training programme.
d) urge States to establish fully independent investigation agencies, that are structurally and functionally separate from regulators, operators, and political authorities;
e) recommend that ICAO provide targeted support to States with demonstrated gaps in safety implementation, particularly those identified through Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) audits, where deficiencies in accident and incident investigation are highlighted; and
f) call upon ICAO to review the effectiveness of the Regional Accident and Incident Investigation Organization (RAIO) programme and, as appropriate, to take necessary measures to support States that lack sufficient resources to establish their own independent accident investigation authority.

Strategic Goals:	This working paper relates to the Strategic Goal *Every Flight is Safe and Secure*.

[1] English, Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish versions provided by IATA.

Financial implications:	It is not expected that there will be significant financial implications to ICAO, given this work can be developed by the existing working bodies.
References:	Annex 13 — *Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation* to the Convention on International Civil Aviation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The timely publication of final reports following aircraft accident investigations is a fundamental requirement under ICAO Annex 13 — *Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation*. The framework establishes short-, medium-, and long-term requirements for the accident investigation process. It also sets out requirements for the independence of the accident investigation authority.

1.2 The Fourteenth Air Navigation Conference (AN-Conf/14) recognized the risk to the global aviation system when safety lessons learned from investigations are not applied in a timely manner.

1.3 Between 2018-2023, the International Air Transport Association (IATA accident data and accident investigation final report, as presented in the IATA Annual Safety Report, show that out of the 269 accidents classified by the IATA Accident Classification Task Force (ACTF), only 57 per cent resulted in a final report. This figure highlights significant capacity challenges and inconsistent compliance with ICAO Annex 13 obligations. IATA is committed to addressing this issue and will intensify efforts through a comprehensive roadmap to improving the quality and completion rate of final investigation reports. The AN-Conf/14 also reiterated the urgency for States to report and investigate accidents in a timely manner.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Safety is the top priority for IATA. Promoting the importance of accident investigations, enhancing the effectiveness of investigation capabilities, the need for the timely publication of accident investigation reports, and establishing a safety recommendations repository derived from accident investigation reports are key objectives included in IATA's work plan.

2.2 Failure to publish thorough and timely accident investigation reports prevents operators, equipment manufacturers, regulators, infrastructure providers, and other concerned stakeholders from accessing critical information that could help prevent future accidents from occurring and further improve aviation safety. Delays in publishing these reports can hinder the identification of safety issues, impede timely corrective actions, and ultimately compromise aviation safety. IATA advocates for the timely publication of high-quality accident investigation reports that are thorough, complete, and provide a detailed description of the accident. These reports should identify contributing factors and offer actionable recommendations to prevent similar occurrences in the future.

2.3 Furthermore, complete accident investigations and accident reports enable accident survivors and the families of victims to understand the facts surrounding an accident. In contrast incomplete investigations and reports can undermine public confidence in aviation safety.

2.3.1 Ideally, an English version of final reports should always be published. As the international language of aviation, English facilitates the sharing of vital information, improves understanding of

concerns amongst aviation professionals from other countries, and ensures a faster dissemination and implementation of safety recommendations.

2.4 The safety recommendations repository is a valuable tool for preventing future accidents and incidents. It plays a role in:

2.4.1 Identifying systemic safety issues – when multiple investigations result in similar recommendations, it indicates a recurring safety deficiency in aviation;

2.4.2 Assigning greater weight and urgency to global actions – encourages all stakeholders to be proactive when evidence suggests that an issue is not isolated;

2.4.3 Facilitating harmonized safety improvements – it supports the development of standardized safety enhancements and strengthens compliance monitoring efforts;

2.4.4 Improving investigation effectiveness – by making investigation reports more valuable, targeted, and impactful;

2.4.5 Creating a feedback loop – encouraging all stakeholders to mitigate known risks and take proactive measures to prevent future accidents.

2.5 To reiterate, aircraft accident investigations and their resulting recommendations are essential for advancing aviation safety, with the primary aim of preventing future occurrences. Investigating accidents is a cornerstone of global aviation safety, supported by robust regulations, procedures, and competent investigators. Training is crucial for developing and maintaining these competencies. IATA encourages ICAO to ensure States' investigation authorities maintain competency through dedicated accident investigation training courses.

2.6 Similar to the timely publication of final reports, the preliminary reports must also be published in a timely manner following an accident or incident to ensure the rapid dissemination of key factual information early in the process. This helps prevent misinterpretation, speculation, and the spread of misinformation. Timely release is crucial for communicating and highlighting safety issues identified in the investigation's early findings, allowing authorities to take corrective and preventive actions in a timely manner.

2.7 Social media has increasingly become a platform for widespread discussion and scrutiny, serving various purposes such as promoting social causes, sharing news, and connecting communities globally. Commercial air transport accidents often attract significant media attention, leading to swift and sustained public discourse. Given the pervasive nature of social media and the rapid spread of information, it is crucial to promptly release a Preliminary Report containing the facts to support accurate and responsible communication about the occurrence.

2.8 Protecting the identities of all involved in a serious incident or accident is essential to reduce stress, prevent harassment, and safeguard their overall well-being.

2.9 Despite the requirements set forth in ICAO Annex 13, there remains an unacceptable level of non-compliance with obligations under the Chicago *Convention on International Civil Aviation* (Doc 7300) , resulting in significant delays or the complete absence of published reports.

2.10 This is supported by the results of the safety oversight audits, conducted under the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP), which reveal that several States face difficulties in establishing effective systems for investigating accidents and incidents. These challenges are primarily due to:

2.10.1 Inadequate resources, technical expertise, or funding to conduct timely Annex 13 investigations.

2.10.2 Investigator competency, emphasizing that all aircraft accident investigators should be active, current, with updated skills, such as training in advanced data analysis techniques.

2.11 For States lacking the necessary resources for investigations, the establishment of a Regional Accident and Incident Investigation Organization (RAIO) represent a practical approach to effectively conduct a full accident investigation to the delivery of a final report. IATA strongly encourages ICAO to assess the effectiveness of the RAIO program through the Regional Safety Oversight Organizations (RSOOs) and the Regional Accident and Incident Investigation Organizations Assessment Programme (RRAP).

2.12 Furthermore, ICAO is urged to take necessary measures that enable and encourage States, with insufficient resources to establish their own independent accident investigation authority, to actively participate in a RAIO.

2.13 Some investigation agencies or authorities report to the Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Justice or Civil Aviation Authority, which can lead to conflicts of interests.

2.14 When a State's accident investigation agency is not independent of the State aviation authority, as required by ICAO, it may compromise the credibility of the investigation as well as the final report, the findings, and the uptake of the resulting recommendations.

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 The accident investigation process is one of the most important learning tools for advancing global aviation safety standards. However, in order to learn from an accident, the aviation industry requires investigation reports that are independent, complete, accessible and timely. States should adhere to the requirements outlined in ICAO Annex 13 and publish thorough final reports of accident investigations in accordance with the recommendations and especially the timelines required by this Annex, to ensure the continuous improvement of aviation safety.

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