



ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 12: Facilitation Programmes

CIVIL AVIATION COOPERATION IN DISASTER SITUATIONS

(Presented by Colombia and supported by 14 Member States of the Latin American Civil Aviation Commission - LACAC)²

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This working paper examines issues arising from the occurrence of disasters in States to propose the establishment of regulatory provisions and international cooperation mechanisms to facilitate and expedite the movement and entry of aircraft, crews and disaster response personnel, together with information systems that will make it easier to locate and promptly contact sources of assistance required from other States.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- a) request the ICAO Council to review and update the regulatory framework and its legal impacts, incorporating relevant international cooperation mechanisms that will facilitate and expedite the movement and entry of aircraft, crews and disaster response personnel through greater flexibility in the granting of entry permits and in customs and operations procedures, expanding the scope of the provisions of Annex 9: and
- b) encourage ICAO's Regional Offices to build an information system containing data on organizations, aircraft, personnel and equipment that each State would be in a position to provide or offer to others if needed to deal with natural or human-caused disasters.

Strategic Goals:

This working paper relates to Strategic Goals *Aviation Delivers Seamless, Accessible and Reliable Mobility for All, Every Flight is Safe and Secure and No Country Left Behind.*

Financial implications:

References:

Article 38 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation
Annex 9 — *Facilitation*
AN-Conf/14-WP/141 30/6/24 International Cooperation in the Suppression of Large-scale Fires (presented by Colombia)

¹ Spanish version provided by Colombia.

² Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The use of aircraft has proved to be highly effective in dealing with all types of natural or human-caused disasters.

1.2 For several years, ICAO has been strengthening its ties with other United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR), which is the United Nations agency responsible for coordinating international efforts to reduce disaster risk. Its mission is to help governments and communities understand and manage risks, promoting prevention and resilience strategies.

1.3 The role of aviation in humanitarian assistance is critical to ensuring rapid response to disasters and crises. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), in collaboration with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), has led efforts to improve airport efficiency in relief operations. As part of these initiatives, the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (UNDAC), at the request of an affected government, can be deployed to the country within 12 to 48 hours of a sudden-onset disaster. UNDAC's mission is to assess damage and needs, coordinate operations on the ground and manage information, facilitating connections between the national, regional and international response levels.

1.4 ICAO has brought together key actors from the aviation and humanitarian sectors to improve airport efficiency in crisis response, focusing on infrastructure, preparedness and contingency planning. At the second meeting of the Working Group, attention was drawn to the Get Airports Ready for Disaster (GARD) programme, an initiative of the United Nations and Deutsche Post DHL Group and supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to strengthen the capability of airports in emergencies.

1.5 The United Arab Emirates has put in place a comprehensive humanitarian strategy, combining direct responses to crises with support to international organizations. Through the International Humanitarian City in Dubai, as the largest coordination hub, the country has strengthened its efforts to assist vulnerable populations. Addressing the challenges of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, which hosts a large number of refugees and suffers from frequent natural disasters, its approach seeks to improve emergency response and ensure sustained support, strengthening the global humanitarian aid system.

1.6 States that provide humanitarian aid have taken steps to be able to act more quickly in responding to disasters and humanitarian crises, using innovative and technological approaches when traditional methods have proved insufficient. These include the use of drones, search dogs and rescue vessels, and even aid airdrop missions using GPS-guided containers to ensure accurate delivery.

1.7 The United Nations and States are focused on ensuring global coverage of early warning systems, developing climate-resilient infrastructure, establishing financing strategies, fostering recovery and reconstruction after disasters, and promoting nature-based solutions and environmental approaches in which the use of aircraft can play a decisive role.

1.8 For example, the application of water or fire retardants from the air using specially equipped aircraft has been a highly effective means of combating large forest fires, as mentioned in the working paper presented by Colombia (AN-Conf/14 WP/141) during the Fourteenth Air Navigation Conference, held in Montreal last year. This was demonstrated in the fires that affected several countries in the region in 2024, including Brazil, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Ecuador and Colombia, and in the United States in early 2025.

1.9 The same is true of relief and humanitarian support missions responding to natural disasters such as earthquakes, when air transport of personnel and equipment is essential to support rescue efforts. Intense seismic activity occurs frequently in much of South America, and the issue is therefore of special interest to the region.

1.10 Without air support, it would be impossible to carry out search and rescue activities for vessels or aircraft that are lost or involved in accidents, as was evident during the search for and rescue of four children who survived an accident in the Amazon rainforest in Colombia in 2023.

1.11 However, the entry and departure of civil aircraft, their crew members and other transported personnel and their equipment has not always been sufficiently expeditious, nor has their transit over or stopover in the territory of third States, which, in addition to the above, may result in the loss of valuable emergency response time. It is therefore essential to continue working to put in place an efficient legal and regulatory framework, incorporating relevant international cooperation mechanisms that will facilitate and expedite the movement and entry of civil aircraft, crews and disaster response personnel through greater flexibility in the granting of entry permits and in customs and operations procedures.

1.12 In the same vein, while Annex 9 — *Facilitation* to the Chicago Convention contains provisions related to the entry and departure of aircraft and personnel, more specific procedures are needed to streamline and expedite the delivery of support by other States.

1.13 It is important to bear in mind that not all aircraft used for firefighting purposes are necessarily civilian: some may be State aircraft; hence the need to consider the possibility of granting the same expeditious treatment to these aircraft, taking into account the provisions of Article 3 (c) of the Chicago Convention.

1.14 However, States do not always have information that enables them to know first-hand which other States to turn to and what aircraft, equipment or personnel those States have or what they can offer in a given situation. Not having this information means spending valuable time to find out and make the relevant contacts, which leads to delays that can exacerbate the situation. As a result, it is also necessary to take steps to ensure the availability of information on which State or States would be in a position to offer assistance and what organizations, personnel, aircraft, and equipment they have at their disposal for this purpose.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 The sheer magnitude of natural and human-caused disasters can exceed the capacity of the affected State to respond, forcing it to seek help from other States, preferably neighbouring States to ensure the fastest response.

2.2 There is a need to broaden the scope of Annex 9 — *Facilitation*, which contains provisions on relief flights following natural and human-caused disasters which seriously endanger human health or the environment and similar emergency situations where United Nations assistance is required. Those provisions clearly commit States to facilitate the entry into, departure from and transit through their territories of aircraft engaged in relief flights performed by or on behalf of international organizations recognized by the United Nations, or by or on behalf of States, but they are not sufficiently detailed to facilitate the implementation of such a cooperation mechanism in practice.

2.3 Annex 9 — *Facilitation* defines relief flights as “those undertaken in response to natural and human-caused disasters which seriously endanger human health or the environment, as well as similar

emergency situations where United Nations assistance is required”. During a disaster or in the midst of an emergency, it will not always be easy to quickly establish whether or not United Nations assistance is required. At that point, the sole consideration will surely be that the magnitude of the disaster has exceeded or will soon exceed the capacity of the State to deal with it effectively, irrespective of whether or not the aid required comes from the United Nations.

2.4 Annex 9 — *Facilitation* tells States what to do in general terms, but not how to go about it. An additional instrument or document is therefore needed to enable States to request or offer the required assistance, accompanied by a highly streamlined procedure for implementing it, so that the entry of personnel, aircraft and equipment, and transit through third States, is truly expeditious.

2.5 Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and other international civil agencies play an essential role in disaster management, complementing government efforts with their specialized expertise, resources and global reach. Their ability to act quickly enables them to reach underserved communities, providing humanitarian assistance and support in crisis prevention, response and recovery. In addition, they help build long-term resilience, ensuring that affected populations are better equipped to cope with future disasters – and the means these organizations use is civil aviation.

2.6 It should be borne in mind that the personnel and aircraft employed in such missions will not always be civilian in nature. In all conscience, it will be necessary to ensure that State aircraft are treated in the same way as civilian aircraft, without prejudice to the provisions of Article 3 c) of the Chicago Convention.

2.7 Moreover, it would be very useful to have a registry or database that could be easily consulted to determine the resources, including personnel, aircraft and equipment, that each State has available and would be in a position to provide.

2.8 It is also important for States to take into account the costs that such services or support could entail for them and the arrangements they should make in that regard.

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