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Agenda Item 4: Collaborative Approaches to Safety

PROPOSAL FOR THE STRENGTHENING OF CASSOS THROUGH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ICAO-EXECUTED REGIONAL TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROJECT

(Presented by the Secretariat)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Caribbean Aviation Safety and Security Oversight System (CASSOS) was established in 2008 by CARICOM States to ensure compliance with ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARP). While the institutional framework exists, operational implementation has been constrained by resource limitations and political transitions in Member States. This information paper describes the establishment of an ICAO technical cooperation project to provide operational support to CASSOS, while preserving full governance and decision-making authority with the CASSOS Board of Directors. This model mirrors the successful ICAO-CLAC Regional Safety Oversight System (SRVSOP) established through the 1998 Memorandum of Understanding.

Strategic Objectives:

- Every Flight is Safe and Secure
- Aviation is Environmentally Sustainable
- Aviation Delivers Seamless, Accessible, and Reliable Mobility for All
- No Country Left Behind
- The International Civil Aviation Convention and Other Treaties, Laws and Regulations Address All Challenges
- The Economic Development of Air Transport Assures the Delivery of Economic Prosperity and Societal Well-Being for All

References:

- Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Aviation Safety and Security Oversight System (CASSOS), signed 2008
- Memorandum of Understanding between LACAC and ICAO to promote the establishment of a Regional Safety Oversight Cooperation System (SRVSOP), signed 1 October 1998
- ICAO Assembly Resolution A29-13: Strengthening of safety oversight
- Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas Establishing the Caribbean Community, including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy

1. Introduction

1.1. In 2008, fourteen CARICOM Member States signed the Agreement Establishing the Caribbean Aviation Safety and Security Oversight System (CASSOS). This Agreement, designated as an Institution of the Caribbean Community under Article 21 of the Revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, created a regional framework to assist States Parties in meeting their obligations under the Chicago Convention by achieving and maintaining full compliance with ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices.

1.2. CASSOS was designed with a governance structure comprising a Board of Directors (composed of Directors General or Directors of Civil Aviation from States Parties) and an Office of the System Coordinator. The primary objectives include assisting States in ICAO compliance, harmonizing civil aviation regulations across the region, and providing a mechanism for technical cooperation and resource sharing.

1.3. Despite this robust legal and institutional framework, CASSOS has faced significant implementation challenges. Resource constraints, dependency on voluntary State contributions, and political transitions within Member States have limited operational effectiveness. These challenges are not unique to CASSOS but are common to regional oversight mechanisms that lack sustained institutional support.

1.4. The Caribbean region comprises predominantly small and medium-sized civil aviation administrations, many of which face constraints in technical staffing, training capacity, and regulatory development. These constraints have contributed to uneven implementation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) and inconsistent resolution of findings arising from the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP).

1.5. By contrast, the Regional Safety Oversight Cooperation System (SRVSOP) has demonstrated long-term success through a structured ICAO-executed technical cooperation project. Over more than two decades, this model has enabled sustained regulatory harmonization, regional inspector qualification, cooperative oversight activities, and measurable improvements in safety oversight performance.

2. Problem Statement

2.1 CASSOS faces three critical operational challenges: (a) inconsistent funding due to reliance on annual Member State contributions; (b) difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified technical staff; and (c) vulnerability to political changes that disrupt continuity. These factors have prevented CASSOS from fully delivering on its mandate of regional safety oversight and participation in ICAO's Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP).

2.2 The Latin American Civil Aviation Commission (LACAC) faced similar challenges in the 1990s. The solution was established through a Memorandum of Understanding signed on 1 October 1998 between LACAC and ICAO, creating the SRVSOP. Under this model:

- ICAO provides operational management through its Regional Office, including technical coordination, administrative support, and financial management;
- Participating States maintain political and strategic control through their regional organization (LACAC);
- Funding flows through an ICAO-managed trust fund, ensuring financial transparency and continuity;
- ICAO recruits, employs, and manages technical staff under terms approved by States; and
- The system integrates directly with ICAO's USOAP, maximizing efficiency and international recognition.

2.3 This model has proven highly successful, providing Latin American States with sustainable safety oversight capabilities while preserving State sovereignty and decision-making authority. The CASSOS Agreement already contains provisions compatible with this approach, particularly Articles VIII (Functions of the Board) and XII (Functions of the System Coordinator), which allow for delegation of operational functions while maintaining Board authority over policy, budgets, and strategic direction.

2.4 The current regional perspective is that capacity and resource gaps are common across the region. In addition, political transitions and shifting priorities affect continuity and sustainability, reason why it is very difficult for an individual State to address these challenges alone. Regional cooperation is essential and there is a need for sustained institutional commitment and collaboration.

3. Proposed Technical Cooperation Framework

3.1 It is proposed that CARICOM States request ICAO to establish a technical cooperation project to support CASSOS operations, structured as follows:

a) Governance Structure Preservation

The CASSOS Board of Directors retains full authority over: policy direction; approval of annual work programmes and budgets; appointment of the System Coordinator (from ICAO-nominated candidates); strategic oversight; and decisions on member State participation and withdrawals. No operational decision by ICAO staff shall override Board directives.

b) ICAO Operational Support

ICAO, through its NACC Regional Office, provides: management of a dedicated trust fund for CASSOS operations; recruitment and employment of the System Coordinator and technical staff; logistic and administrative infrastructure; coordination of participation in ICAO USOAP audits; technical training and capacity building; and financial reporting in accordance with UN standards.

c) Financial Mechanism

States Parties contribute to an ICAO trust fund based on a formula approved by the CASSOS Board. ICAO applies standard programme support costs (currently approximately 13%). The trust fund operates under ICAO Financial Regulations, with quarterly financial statements provided to the Board and annual external audits. This ensures transparency, continuity, and protection of State investments regardless of political transitions in individual countries.

d) Implementation Modalities

The CASSOS Agreement would be amended to explicitly authorize the Board to engage ICAO as technical service provider. A Project Document would be developed, similar to existing ICAO technical cooperation agreements, defining: scope of services; staffing requirements; budget and funding schedule; reporting mechanisms; and performance indicators. The System Coordinator, while employed by ICAO, reports directly to the CASSOS Board and implements Board-approved work programmes. In addition, the CASSOS agreement will also be updated to apply modern Regional Safety Oversight Organization (RSOO) organizational and management procedures.

3.2 The technical cooperation project will be aimed at strengthening the Civil Aviation Authorities (CAAs) of CARICOM and will include technical assistance, regulatory harmonization, institutional strengthening and regional training developments as the primary focus areas with a phased implementation approach to ensure scalability, adaptability, and lasting impact. This will lay the groundwork for the long-term viability of CASSOS to sustain regional safety and security oversight.

4. Expected benefits of the proposed approach

4.1 This approach offers significant advantages: (a) operational continuity ensured through ICAO's institutional permanence; (b) access to ICAO's global roster of technical experts; (c) economies of scale through shared ICAO and States regional infrastructure; (d) financial management under UN-level controls; and (e) protection of State and Donors investments from disruption due to political transitions.

4.2 Critically, this model strengthens rather than diminishes State sovereignty. Member States retain full control through the CASSOS Board while gaining access to professional implementation capacity that few individual small States could maintain independently. Regional ownership is preserved and enhanced through sustainable operations.

4.3 For ICAO, supporting CASSOS aligns with strategic goals to strengthen safety oversight capabilities worldwide, particularly in regions with resource constraints. It extends ICAO's regional presence in the Caribbean and creates synergies with existing safety programmes.

4.4 The proposed ICAO-executed technical cooperation project represents a strategic, pragmatic, and low-risk pathway to revitalizing CASSOS. By combining regional ownership with ICAO's technical execution capacity, the initiative will significantly enhance aviation safety and security oversight in the Caribbean, support compliance with international obligations, and ensure long-term institutional sustainability.

5. How will ICAO implement the technical cooperation project to support CASSOS?

5.1 In August 2025, an agreement was signed between United Arab Emirates (UAE) and ICAO to provide support to CASSOS and its Member States. In addition, in September 2025 a CARICOM Forum was organized at the ICAO Assembly to announce the project and facilitated the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Qatar and CASSOS for assistance. In October 2025, a needs assessment and checklist were launched to all CASSOS Member States.

5.2 A survey on Aerodromes Regulatory framework in the Caribbean was launched in the period of February 20 through March 6, 2026, which highlighted key findings such as: Regulatory Modernization Importance, Benefits of Regional Harmonization, Structural challenges and the need for a flexible approach. In addition, in April 2026, ICAO also launched a survey on Human Resources in both the States and Regional organizations.

5.3 Currently ICAO is working on the development of several documents such as Inspector profiles, environment model regulations and Aerodrome Model regulations and manuals among others.

5.4 In the meantime, ICAO has received a substantial amount of donor funds from the United Kingdom on top of the donation already made for the hiring of the Aerodromes and Ground Aids (AGA) expert for 11 months to work specifically for CARICOM Member States. The AGA expert is scheduled to start in June 2026. The remaining funds will be dedicated to extending the contract period of the AGA expert and to hire an Air Navigation Services (ANS) safety oversight to support the States in effective implementation in the ANS area. Both AGA and ANS has been identified as the lowest level of effective implementation of ICAO SARPs in the Caribbean Region.

5.5 ICAO is organizing an Effective Delegation and Regional Cooperation Workshop which is scheduled to take place in June 2026 and a Global RSOO/Regional Accident and Incident Organization (RAIO) Forum in Guyana in September 2026.

6. Sustaining Momentum: From Action to Implementation.

6.1 To sustain the momentum, it is essential to create a strong foundation whereby ICAO initiatives are setting the stage for harmonized activities/progress in the region. By doing so will create a critical shift and success now will require active State participation and shared contributions.

6.2 States are invited to support implementation through expertise, data and resources while ICAO will facilitate harmonized and efficient assistance and implementation while building on an existing foundation. The technical cooperation project will be an ICAO -led project, drawing on the SVRSOP (SAM Region RSOO) experience.

6.3 States are invited to actively participate in the ICAO technical working groups and engage jointly rather than separately when negotiating for external resources.

6.4 The success of the technical cooperation project will depend on a strong collaboration between the States, CASSOS, external partners and ICAO who will contribute with shared resources, expertise and oversight solutions. Mutual accountability for regional safety and performance outcomes is essential for the successful outcome of the project.

7. Conclusions

7.1 This information paper has presented the context and rationale for pursuing a strategic approach to the strengthening of CASSOS through an ICAO-executed technical cooperation project. It has highlighted the importance of ensuring a sustainable institutional framework capable of supporting regional harmonization, technical assistance, and the progressive enhancement of safety and security oversight capacities across CARICOM States.

7.2 The paper has also underscored that the long-term viability and effectiveness of such an approach would benefit from continued political commitment, coordinated regional engagement, and adequate financial support from participating States and partners. In this regard, the information provided may contribute to the Meeting's broader consideration of the resolution on *Strengthening of CASSOS through an ICAO Technical Cooperation Project* in the **Appendix**, as well as of the collaborative mechanisms that could support its implementation.

APPENDIX**Strengthening of CASSOS through an ICAO Technical Cooperation Project**

The Meeting recognizes the strategic importance of a robust, sustainable, and effective regional mechanism to support Member States in meeting their obligations under the Convention on International Civil Aviation, particularly in the areas of safety and security oversight.

The Meeting notes the current institutional, technical, and financial challenges affecting the operational capacity and long-term sustainability of the Caribbean Aviation Safety and Security Oversight System (CASSOS).

The Meeting agrees that the establishment of an **ICAO-executed Regional Technical Cooperation Project** represents a strategic and proven approach to strengthening CASSOS, drawing upon the successful experience of similar regional initiatives implemented under ICAO technical cooperation frameworks.

The Meeting therefore decides to endorse the concept of strengthening CASSOS through the development and implementation of an ICAO-executed regional technical cooperation project, aimed at enhancing regulatory harmonization, inspector training and qualification, cooperative oversight activities, and effective resolution of USOAP findings.

The Meeting requests the **CARICOM Secretariat, in coordination with the CASSOS Board and participating Member States**, to **formally engage ICAO**, through its NACC Regional Office and Capacity Development and Implementation Bureau (CDI), to initiate the preparation of a **Project Document (PRODOC)** setting out the objectives, governance arrangements, implementation strategy, budget, and funding mechanisms for the proposed project.

The Meeting invites Member States to **express their interest in participating in the project**, to **nominate national focal points**, and to consider **providing financial and in-kind contributions**, including initial seed funding, to support the timely establishment of the project.

The Meeting further requests CASSOS to report progress on the development of the PRODOC and engagement with ICAO at the next meeting of Directors General, with a view to **formally approve and launch the project**.