Opening Remarks by the
Secretary General of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Juan Carlos Salazar
to the 2026 Accessibility Symposium
ICAO HQ, 14 October 2026

1. It is my great pleasure to welcome you all to this Second Joint International Civil Aviation Organization Symposium on Accessibility in International Civil Aviation.

2. On behalf of ICAO, and ACI and IATA, as much appreciated partners, I would like to extend a warm welcome to each and every one of you as representatives of States, industry, international organizations, academia, and civil society.

3. As we advance the cause of accessibility in aviation, the perspectives and lived experiences of persons with disabilities are crucial to informing the policies, programmes and services we develop and implement.

4. Our discussions here will be enriched and empowered by your voices and expertise, and on behalf of everyone here today, I extend our gratitude to you.

5. ICAO's strategic vision calls for air transport for all by 2050. That truly means everyone.

6. ICAO is positioning civil aviation as a leader in accessibility and inclusivity that inspires all other industries.

7. Aviation has a duty to serve everyone who wants to fly, and we will.

8. I have seen wheelchair users waiting for long stretches because an elevator in the airport terminal was broken.

9. I have seen the lack of dignity at security checks, when personnel struggle to perform searches because they haven't received adequate training on how to serve passengers with disabilities.

10. I have seen passengers needing assistance having to wait until everyone else has left the plane.

11. It is also disheartening to see people stranded because updates were provided through an announcement they couldn't hear, or on a screen they couldn't see.

12. Experiences like these keep surfacing, again and again.

13. It cannot keep happening, and we are all gathered here at ICAO today to ensure it will not.

14. The elderly, persons living with disabilities, and others experiencing accessibility challenges are a growing share of the world's population.

15. That is why improving accessibility is both critical to our core mission as aviation professionals and urgent to the future of our industry.

16. ICAO and its partners are actively delivering improvements for passengers with disabilities.

17. At this meeting, we will first recognize and celebrate our achievements to date, which are the result of our shared effort.

18. Second, this review of successful initiatives will help all of us find ways to progress and inspire ideas on how to go further.

19. Third, by listening and working together, we will address existing and evolving barriers.

20. Over the next two days, we will discuss the full travel experience from booking to arrival, drawing on insights from passengers with disabilities, caregivers, those working on the front lines of aviation, and representatives of organizations working to effect change.

21. We will also address the needs of at-risk travelers and the importance of understanding both visible and less visible vulnerabilities.

22. We must attend to persons living with cognitive disabilities and neurodiversity, in recognition of the unique challenges some travelers face.

23. We will hear updates on the evolving regulatory landscape and practical solutions being implemented in diverse regions and contexts.

24. We will also look at how the ICAO Annex 9 standards, recommended practices, and supporting manuals provide practical guidance.

25. I am proud that ICAO's initiatives in the modernization of passenger processing demonstrates how this guidance is translating into real life progress towards access for all.

26. At the same time, it is important that this Symposium looks into new approaches to innovation and digitization to ensure that no traveler is left behind.

27. We will spotlight new work in digital tools, wayfinding, layouts, boarding systems, and privacy-preserving technology that can improve communication and support for all passengers.

28. ICAO's role at the center of these efforts is clear.

29. Global leadership, informed by global expertise, ensures that solutions address both the needs and the possibilities.

30. We see a continuing increase in demand for services to support people living with visible and non-visible disabilities alike.

31. That is why last year's Session of the ICAO Assembly unanimously reaffirmed our sector's obligation to uphold dignity, protection, and non-discrimination for all at-risk travelers, including those with disabilities.

32. The Assembly reasserted a key principle: equal access lies at the heart of civil aviation.

33. This complements the frameworks established by the United Nations—the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the calls of UN General Assembly.

34. Guided by the mandate given to us by the ICAO Assembly, we will find ways for States and stakeholders to enhance their leadership and cooperation at every level.

35. We must also create strong frameworks for measuring progress and sustaining improvement.

36. The ICAO Assembly has affirmed that dignity and non-discrimination are rights owed to all who travel by air.

37. Let us continue the dialogue on progress, barriers, and solutions of the Assembly, and since our last meeting on Accessibility.

38. This is how States, industry, and civil society organizations will contribute to ICAO's efforts to advance accessibility worldwide.