Opening Remarks by the Secretary General

Mr. Juan Carlos Salazar

to the DGCA-MID/8

26 October 2026

1. It is a great honour to join you today and to address this gathering of aviation leaders from across the Middle East Region and beyond.

2. Allow me to begin by expressing my sincere appreciation to our host State for their generous hospitality and to all those who have contributed to the organization of this important conference.

3. The Middle East Region occupies a unique place in international civil aviation.

4. For centuries, this region has connected continents, cultures, and economies. Today, its aviation sector continues to serve as a bridge between East and West, North and South, linking people, supporting trade, facilitating tourism, and strengthening economic development.

5. The strategic importance of the region to the global air transport system cannot be overstated.

6. Aviation is entering a period of profound transformation.

7. As demand for air transport continues to grow, we are witnessing rapid technological change, evolving passenger expectations, increasing environmental responsibilities, emerging security concerns, growing cyber risks, and the need to build a resilient workforce capable of supporting the aviation systems of the future.

8. Our collective objective is clear: we must ensure that aviation continues to expand while remaining safe, secure, sustainable, and accessible to all.

9. This objective lies at the heart of ICAO's Strategic Plan 2026-2050, which sets out a shared vision for the future of international civil aviation. The Plan is guided by three essential aspirations: achieving zero fatalities from accidents and acts of unlawful interference, reaching net-zero carbon emissions from international aviation by 2050, and ensuring aviation remains an integral part of a connected, accessible, inclusive, and affordable transport system that leaves no country behind.

10. These aspirations are ambitious. But history has shown that aviation achieves its greatest successes when governments, industry, international organizations, and regional partners work together toward common goals.

11. For the MID Region, these aspirations are particularly relevant. The Region continues to experience significant growth in air transport, offering considerable opportunities for economic development, connectivity and integration into the global aviation network. At the same time, this growth brings important responsibilities: strengthening aviation safety and security, enhancing the efficiency and resilience of air navigation systems, accelerating progress towards environmental sustainability, and ensuring that the benefits of aviation are accessible to all States.

12. The MID Region has consistently demonstrated leadership in advancing international civil aviation. Home to some of the world’s most important international aviation hubs, the Region continues to play an increasingly influential role in shaping the future of global aviation. Across the Region, States are investing in modern infrastructure, embracing innovation, strengthening regulatory frameworks, promoting operational excellence and enhancing regional cooperation.

13. The MID Region has demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination in maintaining the continuity of air navigation and aviation operations, even under exceptionally challenging circumstances. This reflects the professionalism and dedication of its aviation personnel, as well as the strong commitment of States and stakeholders to ensuring the safety, security and efficiency of air transport. Such resilience is a testament to the Region’s capability to adapt, cooperate and sustain essential operations in the face of adversity.

14. I would like to take this opportunity to convey ICAO’s deepest sympathies and condolences to victims and their families of attacks on civil airports, aircraft and aviation infrastructure. I wish to convey our sincere gratitude to all MID States who have prioritized the safety and security of civil aviation amid very difficult circumstances in the past few months. States have worked with the ICAO MID Regional Office to manage airspace disruptions through coordinated contingency

planning. The MID Contingency Coordination Team framework enables information-sharing, cross-border contingency routing, and activation of ATM contingency plans when air traffic services are disrupted. This cooperation and support from Member States and industry stakeholders help maintain safety and connectivity, with ICAO MID supporting through close monitoring, communication, and close coordination.

15. On another challenging topic, the ICAO MID and APAC Regional Offices, with the Air Navigation Bureau's support, have strengthened coordination to address air traffic constraints at their interface. A joint technical coordination mechanism and dedicated interregional meetings have advanced dialogue and produced a regional conclusion calling for enhanced cross-regional cooperation.

16. I wish to inform you that ICAO has issued a State letter on Friday, 23 October 2026, to inform that the ICAO State letter, dated March 2013, concerning the safety of civil aircraft operating in the Damascus Flight Information Region (FIR), and the State letter, dated January 2015, concerning the safety of civil aircraft operating in the Tripoli FIR, have been rescinded and should no longer be considered as the basis for operational decisions in these geographical areas. Since their issuance, the situation has evolved considerably. ICAO provisions addressing conflict zone risk management have been incorporated into and enhanced in the relevant Annexes to the Convention, and complemented by associated guidance material, thereby establishing a more comprehensive global framework. In parallel, improvements have been observed in safety, security, air navigation infrastructure and operations.

17. While our primary focus now is to address the current challenges and traffic delays in the interface area between APAC and MID regions, it is also essential to work diligently on a more comprehensive and cooperative mechanism to solve these issues taking into consideration the substantial traffic growth in this region; and one of the potential avenues is the proposed ELEVATE Project.

18. In this respect; I am pleased to announce that a *Development Partners Dialogue* will be held during the final session tomorrow, bringing together States, regional stakeholders, development and financial partners, industry representatives and other potential contributors to discuss needs, review priorities, identify opportunities for complementary assistance, and explore avenues for financial and in-kind support. The Dialogue will also serve as a catalyst for strengthening partnerships, mobilizing resources and establishing effective follow-up mechanisms to advance priority projects towards successful implementation.

19. Keeping this momentum, we must continue to work together to address the opportunities and challenges associated with the Region's rapid growth, improve the efficiency and resilience of air transport operations, and ensure that progress is both sustainable and inclusive. This requires sustained commitment at the national level, effective implementation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices, and stronger regional cooperation to address challenges that transcend national boundaries.

20. This DGCA-MID/8 meeting provides an important opportunity to build on the Region's achievements, reinforce our collective commitment and identify practical, coordinated actions to translate ICAO's global aspirations into tangible results for the MID Region and the international aviation community.

21. New developments such as advanced air mobility, unmanned aircraft systems, digital transformation, and the growing role of artificial intelligence within the aviation ecosystem offer significant opportunities and benefits, but they also require effective governance, international cooperation, and a commitment to harmonized global standards.

22. ICAO stands ready to support all States across the Middle East as they pursue these objectives.

23. Through our standards, policies, capacity-building activities, implementation support programmes, regional initiatives, and the *No Country Left Behind* initiative, we remain committed to helping all States strengthen their aviation systems and fully participate in the benefits that air transport can deliver.

Excellencies,

24. This meeting provides an important opportunity to exchange experiences, identify common priorities, and strengthen cooperation across the region.

25. The challenges before us are significant. Their solutions will therefore require collective action, mutual trust, and shared commitment.

26. Together, we can build an aviation system that remains a driver of economic prosperity, social development, and international cooperation for generations to come.

27. Together, we can advance ICAO's vision of safe, secure and sustainable air transport for all.

28. I wish you every success in your deliberations, and I look forward to the outcomes of this important meeting.