



**Opening address by
the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Toshiyuki Onuma,
to the Changi Aviation Summit 2026
"Rising Above Disruption: Building the Aviation Ecosystem of Tomorrow"**

(Singapore, 2 February 2026)

Good morning,

*Honorable Minister Siew,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Director-Generals of Civil Aviation,
Council Representatives,
Industry Representatives,
Distinguished participants,*

It is my great honour and privilege to share my first words as ICAO Council President, among so many leaders and innovators convened here at this Changi Aviation Summit 2026.

This is my second time to participate in this Summit. Last time, I kicked off my campaign as a candidate for the President of the ICAO Council. This time, I am coming back here, to Singapore, as the President of the ICAO Council.

I want to thank the Singapore Ministry of Transport and the Civil Aviation Authority of Singapore for this opportunity, and for bringing all of us together at this truly decisive point in aviation history.

The importance of our talks here is reflected in the powerful theme Singapore has selected for this conference: "Rising Above Disruption: Building the Aviation Ecosystem of Tomorrow."

Air transport has rebounded with strength since the COVID-19 pandemic. In less than three years since global restrictions eased, our sector has recovered and is now setting new records. Asia and the Pacific are at the forefront of this growth. The region is now the fastest growing aviation market in the world.

The most recent ICAO data shows annual passenger traffic growing by roughly 16% in APAC, compared with about 10% globally. The growth reflects the especially important role aviation plays in this region. If we look at international traffic, the figure is even more impressive, with 26% growth, almost double the global average.

For many small States here, aviation is nothing less than a lifeline. And for millions of people across the region, aviation offers the hope to rise out of poverty. We are connecting more people and more places than ever before.

This recovery is a testament to the enduring value of air connectivity to people, economies, and societies everywhere.

While disruption has shaped and indeed defined aviation for decades, we emerged from the pandemic even stronger than before. Now we face new disruption, and with it, new opportunities. We see dramatic and accelerated change in technologies and markets. New actors are entering our skies, sustainability imperatives grow ever more urgent, and the expectations of society at large and passengers in particular are changing rapidly.

Future generations will live with the legacy of the decisions we make now. And the world is watching.

The ICAO Long Term Strategic Plan for 2050 will align, optimize, and accelerate our efforts as we move forward. This plan is shaped by a clear vision of air transport for all with zero fatalities and net zero carbon emissions. It is grounded in consensus across ICAO's 193 Member States and all our stakeholders from across the air transport system. And, it is designed for action.

January 2026 was in fact the very first month of our implementation of this Plan. This follows the ICAO Assembly's adoption of an unprecedented 32 unanimous Resolutions to support it last year. This broad support recognizes the fact that no single actor will shape the future alone. Only together can we achieve a sector that is safer, more sustainable, and more competitive.

Let us reflect for a moment on the scale of our opportunity.

In 2024, we surpassed 4.6 billion passengers. We expect this figure to roughly triple by mid-century. Cargo volumes will also more than double. Much of this growth will come from Asia and the Pacific. Air travel and air cargo in the region are growing faster than anywhere else. New airports and new routes are opening every year. Airlines are adding more planes and using new technology. Our systems, our infrastructure, and our regulations must keep pace.

A system built for four billion passengers cannot support three times that number without transformation.

In harmony with ICAO planning and standards, we must strengthen regulatory oversight, modernize infrastructure, invest in people and skills, and drive innovation. We must also accelerate progress to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The ICAO Assembly has united the world around this goal.

Now, it is time to deliver real results through new fuels, advanced technologies, improved operations, and new ways of collaboration.

This summit offers a platform to showcase leadership in sustainable aviation, from new aircraft systems and automation to sustainable fuels and investment in green infrastructure. And as we innovate and grow, we must also address long-standing gaps, especially for developing countries, landlocked nations, and Small Island Developing States. If we do not close these gaps, growth will deepen divides, instead of bridging them.

This is especially true in Asia and the Pacific. The region is especially diverse, and working together will be the key. APAC States must share knowledge, train together, and help each other build stronger aviation systems. ICAO will support this work so that no country is left behind.

In short, equity and inclusion must guide our efforts. Every country, every community, every person must benefit.

These are the three essential aspirations of ICAO's Long Term Strategic Plan for 2050. We will achieve zero fatalities so that every flight is safe and secure. We must reach net-zero carbon emissions, making aviation an example of environmental responsibility. We must ensure universal access so that air transport serves everyone, everywhere.

These aspirations rest on a foundation of six goals.

Continuous improvement of safety and security will continue to guide our efforts.

Environmental action will safeguard our progress.

Equity and inclusion will open new opportunities, and in doing so, ensure aviation will support prosperity and opportunity in all regions.

Seamless, reliable, and accessible mobility will connect people and goods.

And our international legal framework will modernize and become even more responsive.

To deliver on these goals, the Plan calls for innovation, digital transformation, capacity building, the removal of all barriers to careers in aviation, the building of partnerships at every level, and focused resource mobilization.

ICAO is leading by example. We have reformed to become more efficient and responsive, fostering a culture of openness and accountability.

We are working with industry and States to drive innovation and regulate new frontiers: advanced air mobility, aviation cybersecurity, crisis preparedness and risk management, digital travel credentials, and secure border management, to name but a few.

We are deepening our commitment to ensure that No Country is Left Behind, which is now a central goal under the Plan. We have launched the Finvest Hub to accelerate investment in Sustainable Aviation Fuels and Lower Carbon Aviation Fuels. This is a key component in our multi-strand strategy to decarbonize flight.

We are investing in the next generation through education, workforce development, and support for innovation.

Asia and the Pacific are also leading by example.

Safety is a top priority, with more airports certified to international standards and safety teams working together across borders. APAC is also making progress on climate action, with many States participating in CORSIA and the region investing in sustainable fuels and greener airports. As Minister mentioned, Singapore is a leader in many of these efforts.

And across APAC, States are building skilled teams, investing in people, and opening the doors for more women and young people in aviation. Together, they are showing how cooperation, innovation, and inclusion can help aviation grow safely and sustainably—for everyone.

I want to highlight the crucial leadership of Singapore in driving progress across APAC.

Singapore is bringing partners together, as we are today, and supports new technology for safer and more efficient skies. It hosts major training centres, and is active in critical areas like digital innovation, space-based communications, and climate action.

Singapore's work helps set the standard for the region, and the world.

And of course, as APAC moves forward together towards our shared vision, ICAO's regional office in Bangkok will continue to work closely with States to enable collaboration and support stronger aviation systems.

Distinguished colleagues,

The world is asking: How will we make aviation safer? How will we make it cleaner? How will we make it accessible to all?

We hear new voices. We see new ambitions. We have new tools. And to answer cohesively, and persuasively, we need resolve.

We must see change as an opportunity for growth. We have a shared commitment through the ICAO Long Term Strategic Plan. We must use it to coordinate and align our efforts to transform aviation.

Thank you very much for your attention.

— END —