Opening Address by
the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Toshiyuki Onuma,
to the 40th Session of the ICAO Legal Committee

(Montréal, Canada, 26 October 2026)

Madam Chairperson,
Distinguished Delegates and Observers,

It is a great pleasure to welcome you to the 40th Session of the ICAO Legal Committee.

Since its establishment by the First Session of the ICAO Assembly in 1947, the Legal Committee has helped drive the progressive development of international air law.

Its contribution to this development and codification of the legal framework governing international civil aviation has been both enduring and unparalleled.

As the aviation sector continues to evolve, so too must the legal framework that underpins it.

Through its work, the Legal Committee helps ensure that international air law remains responsive to emerging challenges and the evolving needs of the global aviation community.

I am confident that, during this Session, the Committee will once again bring its expertise, experience and spirit of cooperation.

ICAO's strategic planning foresees air transport for all by 2050, with zero fatalities and net-zero carbon emissions.

This is the first year of our strategic plan to realize this vision.

By responding to the challenges of change, this Committee has a key opportunity to create very significant momentum towards our 2050 vision.

A sound, coherent and effective international legal framework is fundamental to the safe, secure, orderly and sustainable development of international civil aviation.

It provides the legal certainty, common principles and shared rules upon which effective cooperation among States depends.

Since the 39th Session of the Legal Committee in 2024, the 42nd ICAO Assembly last September approved a revised General Work Programme for the Legal Committee.

As you are aware, that Programme comprises eight Items addressing a broad range of legal matters.

Among these, the Committee will review progress on the implementation of Article 12 of the Chicago Convention. This is with a view to promote greater consistency in the enforcement of the rules of the air and enhancing legal certainty for international operators.

The Committee will consider the future role of the International Explosives Technical Commission under the MEX Convention. This aims to identify an approach that provides the Council of ICAO with appropriate flexibility in carrying out its responsibilities.

The Committee will also examine legal issues relating to unmanned aircraft operations, including their safe and effective integration into civil aviation.

The General Work Programme also encompasses several other matters of considerable importance: the promotion of the ratification of international air law instruments; acts or offences of concern to the international aviation community, including cyber threats; data protection and the study of international legal issues relating to global satellite systems and services supporting international air navigation.

These too will strengthen the legal framework underpinning progress towards ICAO's strategic vision.

Distinguished Delegates, allow me also to highlight a significant development in the institutional history of ICAO. On 12 June 2026, the 2016 Protocols amending Articles 50 (a) and 56 of the Chicago Convention entered into force. The membership of the ICAO Council will increase from 36 to 40 and the Air Navigation Commission from 19 to 21.

Next month, Member States will convene here in Montréal for an Extraordinary Session of the Assembly to elect the four additional Members of the Council. This Session will take place in conjunction with the Seventh Air Transport Conference.

These developments represent an important milestone for ICAO. They also remind us of the importance of broad participation by States in the international legal framework.

I take this opportunity to encourage all States to continue their efforts to promote wider participation in international air law treaties.

Distinguished Delegates. The breadth of the agenda before you is a reflection of the importance of the Committee's work. It also reflects the increasingly complex legal environment in which international civil aviation operates.

I am confident that your deliberations will further strengthen the international legal framework for civil aviation. They will help ensure that together we are able to meet the needs of a rapidly evolving global aviation system.

Allow me, to make personal reflection. I am a lawyer myself having worked in the Legal Bureau as a secondee. I see many familiar faces, colleagues and friends with whom I have had the privilege of working over the years.

It is a welcome reminder that, while international law is built through treaties, institutions and carefully negotiated texts, its progress ultimately depends on people. People who contribute their expertise, commitment and spirit of cooperation.

Madam Chairperson, Ms. Alice Serpa Braga, I wish to congratulate you once again on your election as chair. I am confident that the Committee will benefit greatly from your leadership in the days ahead.

I would also like to recognize the Chairpersons, the Rapporteur and members of the various task forces, study groups and other groups. Your dedication and expertise have contributed to the work now before the Committee.

On behalf of the Council, I extend my sincere appreciation to all of you for your commitment, and for the important contribution you continue to make to the development of international air law.

May this 40th Session build upon the Legal Committee's distinguished legacy, while looking ahead with ambition and foresight to the legal challenges and opportunities that will shape the future of international civil aviation.

Thank you.

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