



**Remarks by the
Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
to the 2020 ATN Summer Aviation Forum**

(Athens, Greece,, 28 August 2020)

We are living through an important turning point for aviation today.

COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on local and global air connectivity, and on the many countries and operators who made that connectivity possible.

It has also tragically impacted the lives of the hundreds of millions of economically vulnerable men and women around the world who depend on aviation and tourism for their very livelihoods.

Last week a special UN policy brief on the devastating effects of COVID-19 on global tourism was presented to the world by UN Secretary General Guterres.

He aptly noted that the ability we share to travel the world and experience its cultural and natural riches brings people closer to each other, highlighting our common humanity.

He also highlighted the need for innovative solutions to ensure a green, resilient recovery.

In appreciating that global connectivity and tourism are so fundamental to intercultural understanding, and to the peace and economic well-being of our world, Mr. Guterres went so far as to refer to them as one of the ‘wonders of our world’ in their own right.

This accomplishment is one we can all take some pride in helping to realize, and a clear testament to what countries and operators achieved together under the Chicago Convention during the first seven decades of international flight.

Working together, they fulfilled the vision of the Convention’s drafters to create and preserve greater friendship and understanding among the peoples of the world, and those efforts and achievements did not go unappreciated.

This is why our network was so healthy and robust pre-COVID-19, even stretching at the seams a little, as operators made flying safer, more secure, more efficient, and more affordable, and an eager public took to the skies in the billions each year.

Given the importance of air travel to such fundamental collective aspirations, and to every individual's quality of life, aviation leaders have a great responsibility upon them today as we confront the existential threats of this pandemic.

In the first place we have a duty to keep current passengers and crew protected from COVID-19 health risks through every stage of the air travel experience.

Secondly we need to keep commercial civil aviation viable from the most basic of economic standpoints.

Thirdly we must ensure that it restarts and recovers with due consideration of all associated safety, security, and other traditional aviation performance metrics.

Lastly we need to rebuild it on a solid foundation of sustainability: both in terms of the network's ability to better withstand future pandemics, and its overall role in the social and environmental impacts of travel and tourism.

The first and third of these priorities were precisely why the ICAO Council produced its CART Report and Take-off Guidelines earlier this year.

They were also the driver for the many other activities undertaken at the Secretariat level in ICAO, notably with respect to the special guidance, monitoring platforms, and resources it has made available.

And since public subsidies and bailouts are so critical to sustaining many operators through this period, ICAO has also been helping national governments to appreciate what's at stake in terms of airline and airport economic survival.

Addressing the penultimate priorities in terms of how we 'build back better' and more sustainably, will require the vision and leadership of all us in this forum today, and a heavy reliance on innovation going forward.

Whether we are talking entirely new technologies, or new applications of existing technologies, solutions are now at hand to permit us to pre-screen passengers more extensively than ever before, for both health and security risks, and in a manner less disruptive than today.

We are also presented with a reality whereby many older and more emissions-intensive aircraft are being pulled from the skies, and in significant numbers.

This presents opportunities to assure a much greener post-COVID fleet, and in light of recent targets which were set, even the age of electric commercial aircraft could be upon us by next decade.

It's also important to recall, where aviation and Sustainable Development Goals are concerned, that the inter-relationships between aviation, tourism, and the natural environment and civil societies are complex and symbiotic, and not simply a matter of carbon emissions from commercial jets.

A great many of the world's protected forests and ecosystems, for example, actually depend on international tourists paying special fees to enter and explore these protected areas.

Since the pandemic began, for example, the UN has reported that 14 African countries have lost \$142 million in these tourism-related revenues in 2020, and that many fragile ecological areas worldwide are now being placed at higher risk as economically vulnerable populations consider exploiting them for other means of survival.

With innovation set to play such an important role in how we restart and recover on a more sustainable path, and eventually find a more perfect balance between air transport, tourism, and the natural and civic capacities of tourist destinations, it's fortuitous that the ICAO Council had already set ICAO on a course to focus on innovation in aviation during the 2020-2024 period.

It's goal in establishing an innovation theme for ICAO to strive toward was to achieve greater flexibility, responsiveness, and efficiency in the Organization where the assessment and rule-making on promising new developments is concerned.

And an important part of my message to you today is that you can therefore count on ICAO to be your committed and effective partner going forward in all things innovation-related.

Most of the onus toward addressing these priorities and enabling innovation also falls to you, however, and even as you face incredible challenges to the fundamentals of your businesses and operations.

As the Council Task Force underscored in its CART Report, it is therefore of the utmost importance that all aviation stakeholders continue to show solidarity with one another, and to "work as one aviation team" toward our shared goal of safely and sustainably reconnecting the world.

This is a time not only for great leadership, but also deeper collaboration, and I can think of no other sector more capable in those capacities than our own. Thank you.