



ICAO

**Remarks by the Council President  
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),  
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,  
to the inaugural Safer Skies Forum**

*(Virtual event, 8 December 2020)*

Good morning or good afternoon, depending where you are, to the participants in this Safer Skies Forum

And thank you very much to Minister Marc Garneau for inviting me to address you at its opening.

I wish to begin by expressing the gratitude of ICAO Member States for Canada's very proactive and determined efforts toward the realization of its 'Safer Skies' initiative, and this inaugural Safer Skies Forum.

That same appreciation was clearly evidenced by its unanimous endorsement by all 36 States on ICAO's Governing Body.

I must reiterate here as well, however, the very deep regret, of myself and the entire Council, that these actions became so urgent and so necessary this year because of the tragic loss of Ukraine Airlines Flight PS752.

The subject of civil aviation and military conflict zones is a complex one, and one which countries placed under renewed scrutiny in 2014, following the tragic shoot down of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17.

Governments established a special task force at that time through ICAO, and it in turn agreed on a comprehensive conflict zone work programme the ICAO Secretariat would pursue.

It also agreed to establish a Conflict Zone information sharing repository, hosted by ICAO, where national governments could publish their latest conflict risk information for mutual benefit.

The review of ICAO Standards and guidance led to amendments being issued for five separate annexes to the Chicago Convention, and to the initiation or amendments of numerous supporting circulars and other guidance materials.

It also led to the successful development, in 2016, of an entirely new ICAO manual on *Risk Assessment for Civil Aircraft Operations Over or Near Conflict Zones*.

The premise for the Conflict Zone Information Repository, which was subject to various levels of diplomatic sign-off before information about other countries could be published on it, eventually became superseded by the increasing capabilities of willing States and others to share conflict zone risk information directly, in real-time.

But also relevant to the repository's practical application were the inherent challenges which arise when civilian safety risk managers seek to prevent or address threats arising from military, and not civilian activities.

This acknowledges that military operations during conflicts are by definition confidential matters of national security, and that this leads to impediments when the effective management of conflict zone risk relies on more and better information being shared in advance.

The current conflict zone risk mitigation framework functions on the basis of countries being responsible to issue prompt notifications to other countries, and applicable airline operators, on any development taking place in their sovereign territories which could pose risks to the safety of civilian air operations.

Countries similarly have complete authority over their airspace, and over the ability to restrict or close it to civilian flights when they deem local risks to be severe.

These same principles of national sovereignty on the one hand, and Chicago Convention multilateral accountability on the other, apply whether we are discussing safety risks arising from conflict zones, volcanic eruptions, missile tests, or any other activity which could pose safety risks to civilian aircraft, passengers, or crew.

In addition to these government-side responsibilities and authorities, the second important pillar in conflict zone risk mitigation refers to airline operators.

They are each directly responsible for carrying out daily risk assessments of their route networks, and to make the day-by-day, hour-by-hour decisions on when it is or isn't safe to fly somewhere based on the latest risk information available.

It was within this context then that countries have now endorsed Canada's 'Safer Skies' proposals, and taken new diplomatic steps through ICAO to assure that all related standards and any associated gaps are re-assessed and re-addressed.

The ICAO Secretariat has taken on this work in earnest, and as part of its ongoing analyses has recently initiated a consultation with Member States and international organizations on existing risk assessment methodologies being employed by States and operators.

The results of this process will greatly assist in defining our next steps at the multilateral level, and in helping to achieve greater focus and improved results on conflict zone risk mitigation in the future.

Governments and operators have key roles to play in helping to assure that future conflict zone risks don't again lead to the loss of civilian lives, and the ICAO Council and Secretariat will continue to support and aid their efforts on behalf of the billions of passengers each year who deserve the assurance of those safer skies.

Thank you.