



**Remarks
by the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
to the 39th Plenary Session of the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC)**

(Virtual Event, 12-13 July 2021)

*Directors General,
Distinguished government and industry participants,
Friends and colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

Let me start by expressing my thanks to the President of ECAC, Ms. Ingrid Cherfils and to the Executive Secretary, Ms. Patricia Reverdy, for their kind invitation to address you at this 39th Plenary Session of ECAC. As you know, I participated in several ECAC Plenary Sessions in the past. This year, for the first time, ECAC holds its Plenary Session in a virtual meeting. While the atmosphere and value of meeting in person cannot be replaced, we must nevertheless remain optimistic that we are well on course for recovery.

I wish to begin by thanking ECAC for its support to the ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART). One of the key elements of CART has been partnership. For the first time, Regional Organizations, International Organizations and Industry have been included on a Council Task Force, working cooperatively toward the common objective of aviation recovery.

As you know earlier this year the ICAO Council adopted the Phase III amendments to its pandemic-related *Take-off Guidelines* and main Recommendations.

Following the emergence of new virus variants, vaccine rollouts, and other innovations to battle COVID-19, the work of CART is now targeting specific issues related to multilayer risk management strategies, and with the ultimate objective of restoring public confidence in air travel and getting passengers to fly again.

The final package of CART recommendations, CART Phase III supports the creation of public health travel corridors, safe and efficient global vaccine distribution, the facilitation of all-cargo air services, and standardized COVID-19 testing certificates for secure international use.

It also recommends air crew vaccination considerations, safety priorities relating to sectoral recovery, and an encouragement for national civil aviation and transport officials to advocate more vigorously for air transport public health and economic priorities.

Taken together, the latest Phase III adjustments have been strategized under three key areas of coordination priority.

The first of these is the establishment of national and regional risk management strategies to gradually open air routes based on mutually-recognized public health measures.

Success here will rely heavily on national decision-makers taking fuller account of air transport's role as an enabler and multiplier of economic recovery.

To that end, we should recall CART Phase III Recommendation 20, which calls for Member States to ensure that ICAO's CART guidance is taken into consideration by the wider State administration and inform decision-making processes on national recovery planning.

The second area of CART priority concerns the possibly profound long-term implications for traditional air transport business models and operations post-pandemic. The accelerating digitization of the sector will be a key factor here, but just as important will be the higher passenger expectations for healthier airports and cabins and more sustainable low-emissions air travel options.

These transformations could lead to new approaches to network and fleet management, and air travel product design and pricing, with notable implications for travel and tourism markets and suppliers.

The third key area of priority concerns the need for us to continue to effectively coordinate, share information and learn together from COVID-19, to improve overall air transport crisis preparedness, enhance the sector's overall economic and environmental sustainability, and achieve more efficient operations.

ICAO and its Member States clearly recognize that the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health crisis; it is also an economic and financial crisis presenting governments with very difficult trade-offs in terms of the health, economic and social priorities concerned.

While public health is and must remain, the overriding priority for civil societies and aviation leaders and planners, we must also continue to support and raise awareness on the critical role being played by air transport in global crisis response and recovery.

International supply chains for perishable foods and other essential goods; emergency and humanitarian response capabilities and of course the swift distribution of COVID-19 vaccines all strongly rely on the safe and reliable air services which we all work together to help realize.

Beyond that, seamless air connectivity permits the safe and efficient movement of people, goods, and services, and has far-reaching cross-cutting impacts on other industry sectors. Such contributions are and will remain critical to overall national and regional economic recovery, as well as to future growth.

These issues and others will be at the forefront of discussions at the High-Level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC) which ICAO is convening this October.

Our goal with this event will be to generate the political will needed to confront COVID-19 through effective multilateral action and to establish formal commitments supporting the safe and efficient recovery of civil aviation as well as its increased long-term resilience and sustainability.

European States are already demonstrating leadership in this area, and I wish to welcome in this context the recently updated guidelines from EASA and the European Center for Disease Control (ECDC), stating that travelers fully vaccinated against COVID-19 should not be subject to testing or quarantine will make travel easier by avoiding duplicate checks.

Their new recommendations also set the stage for the deployment of the European Digital COVID Certificate, which came into effect on 1 July.

Industry groups and applicable international and regional airline associations have been very eagerly awaiting these types of developments, and they and ICAO will be counting on Member States to play their part by updating their existing measures based on proper risk analyses so that passenger confidence and international connectivity can eventually be restored.

In May of this year the ICAO Air Transport Committee approved the Visible Digital Seal specifications which ICAO has been developing for several years, and which are now being tested as part of Europe's digital health certificate solution.

The Visible Digital Seal provides a practical and secure verification solution for digital travel or health credentials, making use of the existing e-passport trust model and infrastructure presently use among 145 States, and a new ICAO webinar is presently being finalized which will explain their scope and potential in further detail for other States and Regions.

ICAO looks forward to Europe's results with this endeavour, and to helping identify the solutions and best practices which will permit wider global consideration and adoption of digital health credentials as local health circumstances permit.

European colleagues, I'm greatly encouraged by the pace of these latest advances, and reassured that as vaccines continue to do their work people everywhere will take to the skies again.

In concluding today, I wish to underscore that the sustainability and prosperity of States will rely primarily on the commitments you make to work together to recover your connections to the world, because no one State can achieve this on its own.

Thank you for your attention.