



ICAO

**Opening remarks
by the Council President
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
to the Opening Plenary
of the 2021 ICAO High-Level Conference on COVID-19**

(Virtual event, 12 October 2021)

*Excellencies,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished delegates, guests and colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It's my great pleasure today to welcome you to ICAO's High-Level Conference on COVID-19 which will address the theme of *One vision for Aviation Recovery, Resilience and Sustainability beyond the global pandemic*.

This is not only the first-ever ICAO High Level Conference held virtually, a reality of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is also the first ever ICAO Conference which encompasses three closely related components.

These are the **Ministerial sessions**, occurring today, tomorrow and at the closing on 22 October, which will address the actions that States can and should take to re-establish international connectivity while at the same time strengthening public confidence in air travel. The **Safety Stream**, which will address, amongst other topics, the importance of ensuring that safety remains the top priority when aviation will resume higher traffic volumes. And, the **Facilitation Stream** which reminds us of the importance of strengthening the aviation health-related measures contained in Annex 9 - Facilitation to the Convention on International Civil Aviation **or Chicago Convention** so that international air transport is even more resilient in the face of potential future pandemics.

Given the extraordinary situation, and severe challenges facing global aviation and international air mobility due to the pandemic, the importance of this event to international travel and trade, and to the prosperity and sustainability of economies everywhere, cannot be under-emphasized.

For the air transport and tourism sectors, COVID-19's impacts have been especially significant.

Indeed the past 20 months have confronted aviation with the darkest skies it has ever encountered.

And while this sector and its very united global community has faced and overcome many crises in its past, and has helped lift the world out of some of its most severe global recessions, COVID-19's effects have led not only to transient supply shock to the global air network, but to systemic global demand shock.

From the outset, prudent health and safety measures to help countries control the spread of the infection led to passengers, goods, and aircraft being grounded, to routes being abandoned, and to citizens of many nationalities being left stranded far from home.

Emergency multilateral efforts through ICAO and other UN bodies then led to a restoration of essential air services, assuring that loved ones could be repatriated and re-united, and that critical food and medical supplies and expert personnel could continue to be quickly and safely moved to where the world needed them most.

When considered alongside the incredible expansion and diversification of e-commerce which air transport has also made possible during this period, it's clear that our connections by air, and the companies and skilled personnel who keep them functioning, have played a critical role in making this global pandemic much less severe for civil societies than it might have been.

But without continued government partnership and support, for both air transport operators and regulators, both the global response and an efficient worldwide recovery from COVID-19 could be placed in serious jeopardy.

Evidently, these events touch the heart of ICAO's mission and role.

From the onset of the crisis we have therefore united States, the international community, and industry, under the auspices of the ICAO Council's Aviation Recovery Taskforce (CART).

This coordination has allowed us to deliver critical recommendations and guidance promoting harmonized aviation and public health response and recovery measures. Nevertheless, consecutive pandemic waves, the emergence of new COVID variants, and greatly varying COVID circumstances and restrictions country-to-country, still pose challenges to these alignment efforts.

This explains why we need new and even stronger multilateral commitments forged here that are aimed at safely restoring air travel, supporting industry and operational viability, and strengthening public and commercial confidence in travel and trade by air.

As with all previous global pandemics, COVID-19 will eventually come to an end. Vaccination is key to these efforts, and much more must be done, both publicly and privately, to address the current international disparities in vaccine availability.

With the light at the end of the COVID tunnel now in sight, we must remain focused on the fact that it is a beacon which calls upon each of us to do more than just return this world and its air transport system back to normal.

This is because in parallel to the pandemic we are witnessing an incredible surge in innovation across both the medical and aviation domains, and this places a strong onus upon each of us to take advantage of these advances and usher in an entirely new era in global aviation resilience and sustainability.

New types of aircraft and propulsion, digital technologies for contactless passenger health and security processing, new travel products to address passenger expectations for low carbon journeys, nothing can be neglected as we work to live up to this conference's theme of "One Vision for Aviation Recovery, Resilience and Sustainability beyond the Global Pandemic".

Honourable Ministers,

In concluding, I wish to underscore that while on the one hand international air transport may contribute to spreading the disease, thanks to effective and harmonized risk-based measures, it is also a key enabler for the worldwide economic and social recovery after the pandemic.

To this end, strong multilateral cooperation among States, industry, and international and regional organizations remains essential on multiple fronts, and we must remain cognizant of the increasingly acute civil society calls to curb and eliminate aviation carbon emissions.

I am confident that as we begin this conference this morning, motivation to reach a consensus on a global approach among States and industry is very high. enough to put this pandemic behind us, and place us back on a path to national, regional, and global prosperity aligned with *Agenda 2030* and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

As we reflect on these priorities today, allow me to thank our distinguished participants who will be sharing their valuable insights with us.

I very much look forward to working with you toward these ambitious outcomes, and to what will be a very productive and engaging conference.

Thank you.