



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

(Pre-recorded message, 29 March 2022)

I wish to begin today by emphasizing the gratitude of ICAO and its Member States for Canada's *Safer Skies* initiative, an effort which has been tremendously appreciated at the international level, and unanimously endorsed by all ICAO Council States.

I have been deeply honoured to collaborate with both Ministers Garneau and Alghabra in this context, and to witness firsthand what a country's commitment to safety can accomplish when it is pursued with the dedication Canada has brought to its *Safer Skies* objectives.

This programme was launched, in direct response to the circumstances of the tragic loss of Ukraine International Airlines Flight PS 752 in January of 2020, acknowledging the increased risks of flights over or near conflict zones. The current tragic events in Ukraine reinforce this warning and remind us that another aircraft, Flight MH17, was downed in this area. Every effort must be made to ensure the safety of aviation operations in contiguous areas of conflict zones so that never again will there be a downing of an aircraft with innocent civilian passengers.

Since the launch of the Safer Skies initiative tremendous progress has been made.

As we know, the *Safer Skies* Consultative Committee was established by Canada in July 2020, and later that year it hosted over 400 experts, and officials from 82 countries and 31 industry bodies, at its inaugural edition of this Safer Skies Forum.

At that initial event, very broad consensus was established on the Commitment Statement it produced, and there was wide-ranging support for the more frank and open dialogue on conflict zones which has emerged as a result of these efforts.

When Minister Alghabra updated the ICAO Council about these developments in early March of 2021, he encouraged the Council to devote consideration to how the current Annex 13 accident investigation framework could be strengthened to ensure that investigations in downings such as PS752 are always comprehensive, independent, and impartial.

In this connection, ICAO is working, with the engagement of the ICAO Accident Investigation Panel, on how investigations should be conducted when an aircraft accident is caused by unlawful acts.

Those reviews are now ongoing.

The panel is also now looking into the issues which can arise in situations when the independence of a country's Accident Investigation Authority, and indeed the basic credibility of the investigation, can be reasonably challenged by other States and civil aviation stakeholders.

In convening this second Safer Skies Forum, Canada is reconfirming its now longstanding commitments to seek answers, justice, transparency, and accountability for accident victims and their families.

In this regard we should also acknowledge how these events, and related efforts which had been initiated even before the loss of PS 752, have also spurred multilateral action and progress through ICAO on new and related international provisions.

Earlier this month for example, the ICAO Council adopted Amendment 29 to Annex 9 of the Chicago Convention. This development elevates the requirement for countries to establish legislation, regulations and policies in support of assistance to aircraft accident victims and their families, from its former status as a recommended practice to a full and more binding international standard.

The ICAO Council also established 20 February as a new international day to commemorate aircraft accident victims and their families, so that related objectives and priorities have the opportunity to be more regularly promoted and actioned. This was possible as a result of ICAO's ongoing collaboration with the *Air Crash Victims' Families' Federation International* (ACVFFI). ICAO, together with the global aviation community, marked the first such day of commemoration last month, in Council and with a series of outreach communications on its social media platforms.

In addition to this day of commemoration, ICAO has also of course concluded a Symposium on this topic, and undertaken various activities at the secretariat level to achieve some important near-term outcomes.

I also take this opportunity to mention that ICAO's Aviation Security Panel Working Group on Threat and Risk continues to assess that the majority of terrorist attacks against civil aviation worldwide continue to target airports in conflict zones, and using a wide range of weapons systems and tactics.

The persisting factors continue to underscore for us that governments and airlines will have key roles to play for some time to come in helping to assure that future conflict zones risks do not again lead to the loss of life of aircraft passengers and crew.

In concluding today, I wish to strongly re-emphasize that the ICAO Council and Secretariat will continue to support and aid these efforts, on behalf the billions of passengers each year who deserve the assurance of the *Safer Skies* which Canada is helping us to achieve.

Thank you for your attention.