



**Opening remarks by
the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
to the ICAO Air Services Negotiation (ICAN) Event**

(Abuja, Nigeria - 5 December 2022, 09:30 – 11:00 Local Time)

*His Excellency Chief of Staff,
Ambassador Ibrahim Gambari,
His Excellency Honourable Minister of Aviation,
Senator Hadi Sirika,
Honourable Ministers,
Directors General and other senior air transport officials here present,
Dear former President of the ICAO Council,
Dr. Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu, ICAO Lifetime Goodwill Ambassador,
Eminent Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It is a pleasure and great honour for me to be here in Abuja and to welcome you all to the fourteenth ICAO Air Services Negotiation Event, commonly known as ICAN.

I would like to express our collective appreciation to the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that has provided us with excellent facilities for this year's event, which in addition to the hospitality of the good people of Nigeria will surely make your work more efficient and enjoyable over the coming days.

The aviation community's appreciation for the ICAN forum have been evidenced over the years by its steadily increasing levels of participation.

This year, we are delighted to welcome almost 400 in-person and virtual delegates, from over 65 ICAO Member States worldwide.

This attendance level is an important reminder that the progressive resurgence of the air transport industry is proceeding at pace post-pandemic, and certainly the agreements you will be pursuing together here will only add to the recovery's momentum.

Since the launch of ICAN in 2008, this forum has grown and evolved to the point that it has now played host to over 5,000 bilateral meetings, resulting in close to 4,000 agreements and arrangements.

Recognizing its intrinsic value as an efficient and cost-saving negotiation and networking venue, promoting the liberalization of air services, States to ICAO's 41st Assembly this past October acknowledged its value and encouraged its wider use.

ICAO has been encouraged by the accelerating global recovery in air travel which we have seen over the past year, and particularly with respect to international operations which gained significant momentum after a long period of stagnancy.

Compared to 2021, passenger totals globally increased by around 50 per cent from January to September of this year, reflecting a 70 per cent recovery of pre-pandemic volumes.

This global trend holds true for Africa as well. By the end of the year ICAO is projecting that this continent will have recovered as much as 80 per cent of its pre-pandemic passenger traffic.

I would also note here that Nigeria's air traffic recovery in particular has been quite remarkable, with fully 90 percent of 2019 pre-pandemic capacity offered for the country having now been restored.

Air cargo played an instrumental role in keeping societies connected with food and medical supplies throughout the pandemic, and with keeping consumers connected with producers through the surge in ecommerce which was witnessed during the worldwide lockdowns.

From an overall standpoint these contributions greatly reduced the pandemic's negative impacts globally, and accordingly air cargo traffic levels remained robust throughout COVID-19 and since the recovery.

Three world regions posted air freight traffic gains this year versus 2019, including Africa, North America and the Middle East, with Africa furthermore posting a double-digit increase.

All of these results highlight what governments can achieve by working effectively together, and the more recent successes in particular highlight what results when States apply more consistent and evidence-based policies in terms of public health and international air transport.

As regulators and air services negotiators, I would also underscore the important role you play in this equation by providing the industry with enabling regulatory frameworks leading to improved air connectivity and more seamless international travel.

The combined impacts of what you will achieve together here over the next few days will serve to enhance consumer choice, expand economic opportunities, and accelerate the impetus to adopt cutting edge innovations.

As you embark on this intensive work, I would like to highlight a few key priorities and issues to help guide your considerations.

ICAO as you know is committed to supporting States in realizing the *Long-term Vision for International Air Transport Liberalization*.

At our recent Assembly, States have accordingly prioritized the liberalization of market access for airlines, and the removal of barriers to access wider capital markets with relaxed nationality requirements for airlines' ownership. These topics are at the forefront of many discussions within ICAO.

As some of you are aware, the Assembly has also tasked the ICAO Council to continue to address the remaining issues of concern towards a *Convention on Foreign Investment in Airlines*, which aims to liberalize air carrier ownership and control on a multilateral basis.

In addition, the Assembly has mandated the Council to conduct an in-depth assessment as of whether there is a need to develop guidance material on the economic regulation of international operations of unmanned aircraft systems.

Due focus must also be placed on the modernization of infrastructure and passenger facilitation processes, as well as toward the harmonization and convergence of regulatory approaches.

Finally, we must assess whether a specific international agreement to further liberalize air cargo services should be developed, notably in view of the surge in global demand for these services post-pandemic.

Dear participants in the ICAN 2022,

The work you will undertake during this event is critical to all aspects of ICAO's air transport objectives, as well as to the future sustainable growth and resilience of international aviation in the post-COVID-19 era.

ICAO will continue to maintain its firm commitment to work with States, regional and sub-regional bodies in the development of measures to foster cooperation, including the development of liberalized arrangements towards achieving the long-term vision for international air transport liberalization.

I would like to once again express our profound gratitude to the Government of Nigeria, the Honourable Minister of Aviation, Senator Hadi Sirika, as well as the Director General of the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority, Captain Musa Nuhu and his team for their continuous support to ICAO and in particular for their generosity in hosting this year's ICAN event.

Hosting this event for the third time in Africa demonstrates not only Nigeria's commitment to the global success of our sector, but also its recognition of the economic benefits that ICAN can bring about to both its participants and its host.

I wish everyone very fruitful and mutually beneficial negotiations and thank you for your attention today.

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