



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

*(The Hague, Netherlands, 6 June 2023)*

We are gathered here today thanks to the Canada's *Safer Skies* initiative, launched as a direct response to the unacceptable and avoidable downing of the Ukraine International Airlines flight PS 752, bound for Kyiv, on 8 January 2020 shortly after take-off from Tehran resulting in the loss of 176 lives. This initiative has been welcomed and appreciated by the ICAO Council and subsequently endorsed by the ICAO Assembly.

On behalf of the ICAO Council, I wish to express my gratitude, once again, to the Government of Canada for their tenacity and commitment to addressing the risks of flying over and around conflict zones.

Commitment is of course key to the prevention of a similar event from ever happening again.

Indeed, the shooting down of flight PS 752 was very regrettably not the first or only instance of its kind.

In this regard, I wish to recall the Korean Airlines flight 007 with 269 passengers and crew on board shot down on 31 August 1983 by a military aircraft of the former Soviet Union. In the aftermath of that event the ICAO Assembly, in May 1984, amended the 1944 Chicago Convention by adopting the Protocol introducing Article 3 bis. This amendment provides that the Contracting States recognize that every State must refrain from the use of weapons against civil aircraft in flight.

Notwithstanding this almost forty-year-old commitment by States, we continue to see instances involving the use of weapons against civil aircraft in flight.

Today, we are generously hosted by the Kingdom of the Netherlands for this third edition of the Safer Skies Forum, and I am equally grateful for the Kingdom's leadership within the Safer Skies initiative.

We visited this morning the MH17 wreckage reconstruction to commemorate the tragedy that happened in 2014 when, after departing Amsterdam on 17 July 2014, Malaysian Airlines flight MH 17 disappeared from radar and all 298 persons on board lost their lives when the aircraft was shot down above Ukraine.

ICAO participated with experts as observers to the investigation that was delegated by Ukraine to the Dutch Safety Board and facilitated communication among the ICAO Member States related to the accident.

In particular, ICAO experts provided procedural guidance and suggestions to advance the investigation to the greatest extent possible.

The Dutch Safety Board's Final Report contained a number of safety recommendations of which six were addressed to ICAO. All have been addressed by ICAO. One of the most tangible outcomes is the Risk Assessment Manual for civil Aircraft Operations Over or Near Conflict Zones (Doc 10084) developed by ICAO with the pivotal support and contribution of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Similarly, several safety recommendations addressed to ICAO were contained in the Final Report prepared by the Civil Aviation Organization of Iran into the loss of flight PS 752, which was published in March 2021.

Those related to risk assessment and issuance of NOTAMs for flights in conflict zones, prioritization of States having potentially hazardous military activities for safety and security audit activities, and enhancement of the available guidance material were all addressed by ICAO.

In addition to these recommendations, other States affected by these tragedies have made proposals for enhancing international civil aviation safety and security.

Following these proposals, an ICAO team of experts, the Accident Investigation Panel, has been working on the concerns about investigations on downing of aircraft and in particular when the independence of the Accident Investigation Authority and credibility of the investigation could be challenged.

Furthermore, ICAO is soliciting Member States, via a State Letter, to provide feedback and input in order to update the Risk Assessment Manual for Civil Aircraft Operations Over and Near Conflict Zones following the 41st Session of the ICAO Assembly's request to prioritize its review.

Several substantive inputs from States and Industry Organizations have been received and are under review and analysis, in close coordination with the Safer Skies Committee.

ICAO plans to issue a third edition of the Risk Assessment Manual taking into account these contributions by the end of this year, along with a programme to develop and roll-out a dedicated workshop.

Before concluding, I wish to stress one point.

Flight safety has reached outstanding levels in recent decades. However, one single accident is one too many. Investigations conducted in accordance with Annex 13 standards seek to determine the cause and contributing factors in order to prevent a reoccurrence.

But the downing of an aircraft with innocent passengers and crew on board is absolutely unacceptable, the result of ineffective civil-military coordination, limited exchange of information, including a lack of intelligence information, and ultimately human error.

Gathered today at this event we have an exceptional and crucially important opportunity to ramp up the political momentum and enhance exchanges of technical expertise fostering the global

cooperation that will underpin the implementation of the Safer Skies initiative.

The importance to ICAO of addressing the risks that conflict zones pose to civil aviation cannot be overstated, and I appreciate this opportunity to engage with you on this critical safety issue, and to reiterate ICAO's full and unwavering support for your work.

Thank you for your kind attention.