



**Keynote Address by
the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
to the joint ICAO/ACI/IATA Symposium on Accessibility
in International Civil Aviation**

(ICAO Headquarters, Montréal, 2 December 2024)

*Honorable Minister of Transport of Canada, Mrs Anand,
Honorable Deputy Minister of Transport, Mr. Thangaraj,
Regional Vice President of IATA, Mr. Cerda,
Director General of ACI World, Mr. Erbacci,
Dear Council Representatives,
Secretary General,
Distinguished Delegates,*

I wish to welcome you to Montréal for this important Symposium on Accessibility in International Civil Aviation. This event, jointly convened with our industry partners - Airports Council International and the International Air Transport Association – represents a crucial step toward a truly inclusive air transport. Together, we are working supporting initiatives towards developing a Strategy on Accessibility and achievement of a disability-inclusive air transport system.

The diversity of voices gathered here in these days – from decision-makers and technical experts to advocacy groups and international organizations - creates opportunities for exchanges and for meaningful change. Your collective expertise will help us not just identify barriers, but build effective solutions that harness technology to enhance the travel experience for all passengers.

Let me share a striking reality: The World Health Organization estimates that 1.3 billion people – about 16 per cent of the global population - currently experience significant disability issues. This number continues to grow as our global population ages and chronic health conditions become more common. Yet many of these individuals choose not to travel by air, or travel less frequently, because of barriers they encounter throughout their journey.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities recognizes that disabilities result from the interaction between individuals with impairments and the barriers that prevent their full participation in society. These barriers can include physical, technological, or attitudinal – all of them can be overcome with proper focus and commitment.

Our Symposium's theme, "*Inclusive and Universally Accessible Air Transport for Persons with Disabilities and Reduced Mobility*", builds on ICAO's Year of Facilitation initiatives. Throughout 2024, we have worked to better facilitate air transport for all. This commitment extends beyond this year -

accessibility will remain a cornerstone of our agenda. We remain committed to collaboration with relevant international organizations, industry stakeholders, advocacy groups and other interested parties.

The drive towards greater social inclusion is gaining momentum globally. It is now an integral part of the global sustainability agenda and is a priority in the UN strategic framework. A recent General Assembly Resolution stressed the urgent need to eliminate transportation barriers for persons with disabilities.

As the United Nations' Specialized Agency for civil aviation, ICAO's leadership is necessary and urgent, particularly in collaborating with our 193 Member States and stakeholders to create a truly inclusive air transport system.

While we have made important progress in improving accessibility, significant challenges remain. This week, we will examine both our achievements and persistent barriers, working together to identify concrete solutions.

ICAO is taking decisive action through Assembly Resolution A41-15 on Accessibility in International Civil Aviation, which provides a clear mandate for accessible air transport services. This commitment is reflected in our Annex 9 – Facilitation Standards and Recommended Practices and strengthened by our dedicated expert working group, which is developing a comprehensive strategy and work programme in close collaboration with stakeholders. You will hear more about this during the Symposium.

As we move forward, States must continue to collaborate with airlines, airports, passengers, and advocacy groups to address existing challenges across communication, technology, infrastructure, and regulations. While we must leverage innovative solutions and advances in technology to create new opportunities, we must be mindful that increasing reliance on digital solutions, such as mobile phones and biometric processes, can create both opportunities and barriers.

Before concluding, to mention the 80th Anniversary, the adoption of the Strategic plan and the strategic objective on Accessibility.

In conclusion, I am confident that our exchange of information and discussions over the next two days will achieve beneficial outcomes toward creating an accessibility-inclusive air transport system for all.

I wish you all a very successful symposium.

Thank you.