



**Keynote Address by
the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
to the Fourth Annual Safer Skies Forum**

(Marrakech, Morocco, 8 April 2025)

*H.E. Abdessamad Kayouh, Minister of Transport and Logistics of the Kingdom of Morocco,
H.E. Arun Thangaraj, Deputy Minister of Transport of Canada,
Distinguished participants,*

I wish to start by thanking our generous host, the Kingdom of Morocco, for the hospitality of this Fourth Safer Skies Forum. Their support for the Safer Skies initiative deserves our sincere appreciation. In particular, let me remind you that it is the first time that the Safer Skies Forum is held in the African continent.

The *Safer Skies* initiative was promoted by Canada in the aftermath of the tragic downing of Ukraine International Airlines flight PS 752, which claimed 176 precious lives. This initiative, born from an unacceptable and preventable tragedy, has received strong support from the ICAO Council and was subsequently endorsed by the 41st ICAO Assembly.

On behalf of the ICAO Council, I extend my deepest gratitude to the Government of Canada for their unwavering resolve in addressing the risks associated with flying over and near conflict zones.

We must remember that conflicts can arise quickly in many parts of the world, creating potentially dangerous risks to civil aviation. This reality demands robust collaboration between governments, aircraft operators, airspace users, air navigation service providers, and other stakeholders to share critical, risk-based information about conflict zones, ensuring the safety of civilian flights.

Our fundamental commitment must be to prevent such tragedies from ever occurring again.

Sadly, the downing of flight PS 752 was not an isolated incident. Over the past decade, we have witnessed multiple instances where passenger aircraft were struck by surface-to-air missiles while traversing conflict zones.

Most recently, the Azerbaijan Airways accident that occurred in Kazakhstan appears to have potential roots from flying in proximity of a conflict zone. Additionally, GNSS interference and/or spoofing originated near conflict zones is becoming more and more a serious problem for flight safety.

Since our last meeting, ICAO has continued working on the recommendations contained in the Dutch Safety Board's Final Report on the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17- which included six safety recommendations for ICAO. We have focused our efforts on two key areas: amending relevant safety standards and developing the Risk Assessment Manual for Civil Aircraft Operations Over and Near Conflict Zones (Doc 10084). Following the PS752 tragedy, ICAO reached out to its Member States seeking their input to further enhance this crucial manual.

The 41st Session of the Assembly directed ICAO to prioritize the review of the Manual, and through close collaboration between ICAO and Safer Skies Committee experts, ICAO published the third edition in late 2023.

The enhanced document now addresses both deliberate attacks and unintentional impacts on civil aircraft, serving as a vital resource for Member States and industry stakeholders in their decision-making processes regarding flight operations over or near conflict zones at cruising altitudes. We have also expanded our guidance to cover surface-to-air missiles, including ballistic missiles, surface-to-surface missiles, and air-to-air attacks. The manual now provides detailed protocols for conflict zone airspace closures, post-conflict airspace assessment, and introduces new guidelines for harmonizing risk assessments and communication. It will be further reviewed to include guidance on GNSS interference following the last regional seminar on Conflict Zones in 2025 and this review is expected to be completed by the end of 2026.

I wish to stress that ICAO remains committed to updating the Manual with emerging lessons learned and values its ongoing partnership with the Safer Skies Committee in this endeavor.

To ensure effective implementation, ICAO has launched a global awareness campaign, including worldwide events – two regional seminars last year in Bangkok, Thailand, and Almaty, Kazakhstan focusing on risk assessment processes with four more to follow in 2025 - and a comprehensive promotional video.

Furthermore, thanks to Canada's generous financial contribution, we will begin developing an ICAO Implementation Package - iPack - for Conflict Zones this year. We look forward to collaborating closely with the Safer Skies Committee throughout its development and implementation.

Let me now emphasize a critical point: Aviation safety and security have reached unprecedented levels in recent decades. Nevertheless, the ICAO Council has established an ambitious goal in its 2026-2050 strategic plan of zero fatalities from accidents and unlawful interference. This goal underscores our firm belief that even one accident is too many. In this regard, investigations under Annex 13 standards serve a vital purpose - to identify causes and contributing factors to prevent future occurrences.

The downing of an aircraft carrying innocent passengers and crew is absolutely unacceptable. Moving forward, we can contribute to preventing such tragedies by responding effectively to the findings of Annex 13 investigations, enhancing civil-military coordination, improving information sharing and better intelligence, and by diminishing human error.

ICAO is committed to developing a robust, globally harmonized crisis response framework to protect international aviation. Our global framework for crisis preparedness and response will provide a structured approach to managing critical situations. It will strengthen coordination among States, industry stakeholders, and United Nations organizations, ensuring harmonized responses.

The aviation sector must maintain operational capability even under challenging circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic taught us an invaluable lesson - preparedness saves lives, economies, and industries.

We need flexible regulatory frameworks that can quickly adapt to crisis scenarios, digital transformation and automation to support operations during workforce shortages, and comprehensive crisis response training to equip aviation professionals with essential emergency management skills. Our success depends on collective action. We need governments, regulatory bodies, industry leaders, and aviation professionals working in concert to build a resilient, agile aviation sector prepared for any future challenges.

As a matter of priority, ICAO is developing a harmonized Regional Air Traffic Management Contingency Framework for implementation across all ICAO regions. This initiative complements our ongoing work on conflict zones and contingency planning.

By providing crucial regulatory and operational guidance, the framework will help ensure regional readiness for airspace disruptions caused by armed conflicts, cyber-attacks, system failures, natural disasters, and public health emergencies.

Let me conclude now by emphasizing that addressing risks from conflict zones remains a top priority for ICAO. I deeply appreciate this opportunity to engage with you on these critical safety and security issues and to reaffirm ICAO's complete and unwavering support for your work.

This Forum presents an extraordinary opportunity to strengthen political momentum and enhance the exchange of technical expertise. Our collaboration over the next two days is fundamental to implementing the Safer Skies initiative successfully. Let us take full advantage of this gathering to advance our important work on this critical issue.

Thank you for your kind attention.