



## ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

#### Agenda Item 12: Outcomes of High-level Conference on COVID-19

#### OUTCOME OF THE MINISTERIAL PLENARY OF THE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON COVID-19

(Presented by the Council of ICAO)

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper reports on the outcomes of the three Ministerial Plenary Sessions held during the High-level Conference on COVID-19 (12 to 22 October 2021), including the Ministerial Declaration. The Ministerial Plenary Sessions were attended by a total of 56 Ministers and Deputy Ministers, as well as 24 heads of international organizations. This record-high attendance by Ministers and Deputy Ministers has demonstrated their recognition of ICAO's leading role in the transport portfolio and scaled up the profile of aviation agenda at a political level. Highlights of the discussions during the Ministerial Plenary Round Tables I and II were captured in the Chair's Summary (Appendix A refers), and firm political commitments to confronting COVID-19 challenges through multilateral actions were set up through the adoption of the Ministerial Declaration (Appendix B refers). The Declaration demonstrated the solidarity and determination, and conveyed a strong political "message" to international communities and world economies. Follow-up actions by ICAO have been focusing on raising awareness of the Declaration and providing support, guidance and assistance to States to increase the uptake of the Declaration.

**Action:** The Assembly is invited to:

- consider the implementation of the HLCC Ministerial Declaration as appropriate; and
- endorse the HLCC Ministerial Declaration presented in Appendix B and the follow-up actions by ICAO as presented in paragraph 5.

<i>Strategic Objectives:</i>	This working paper relates to all Strategic Objectives, especially <i>Safety, Security and Facilitation</i> and <i>Economic Development of Air Transport</i> .
<i>Financial implications:</i>	The required action in this paper can be accomplished through a combination of existing budgetary resources and supplemental extra-budgetary contributions. The implementation and prioritization of the recommendations of the Safety and Facilitation Streams, as well as the financial implications thereof, are presented separately to the Assembly.
<i>References:</i>	A41-WP/41-TE/2 (Safety Stream) A41-WP/20-EX/8 (Facilitation Stream) HLCC 2021-WP/1-PLN/1 and HLCC 2021-WP/3-PLN/3 Doc 10160, <i>High-level Conference on COVID-19 (Montréal, 12 to 22 October 2021)</i> . Report State letters 2021/61 and 2021/70 ICAO Business Plan 2023–2025

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The High-level Conference on COVID-19 (HLCC 2021) was held from 12 to 22 October 2021 in a full virtual setting, and attended by 1,784 representatives from 129 Member States and 38 invited international organizations. Under the theme “*One Vision for Aviation Recovery, Resilience and Sustainability beyond the Global Pandemic*”, the objective of the Conference was to reach a global consensus on a multilateral approach, supported by political will and commitments of States, to enable the safe and efficient recovery of aviation from the COVID-19 crisis and make it more resilient and sustainable in the future.

1.2 The Conference consisted of three Ministerial Plenary Sessions and two technical streams (Safety and Facilitation Streams, A41-WP/41-TE/2 and A41-WP/20-EX/8 refer). This paper focuses primarily on the outcomes of the Ministerial Plenary Sessions, which discussed the key high-level policies responses, set up the firm political commitments to confronting COVID-19 challenges through multilateral actions, and reviewed and adopted the Ministerial Declaration (HLCC 2021-WP/1-PLN/1, HLCC 2021-WP/3-PLN/3 and Doc 10160 refer).

## 2. MINISTERIAL PARTICIPATION AND STATEMENTS

2.1 The Ministerial Plenary Sessions were organized in the United Nations “round table” format on the first, second and last days of the Conference, and attended by a total of 56 Ministers and Deputy Ministers from 52 Member States, as well as 24 heads of international organizations. Among these 52 Member States, approximately one-third were first time attendees at an ICAO meeting by Ministerial-level participants. The number of attendance and interventions is summarized as follows:

Ministerial Plenary Sessions	Ministers and Deputy Ministers	Alternates to Ministers and Deputy Ministers <sup>1</sup>	Heads of international organizations
Round Table I (12 October)	45 (5K <sup>2</sup> , 12R, 5S)	7 (4R, 1S)	21 (1K, 3R, 1S)
Round Table II (13 October)	30 (4K, 9R, 5S)	12 (1R, 7S)	20 (1K, 6R, 1S)
Closing (22 October)	28 (3K, 11R, 4S)	14 (8R, 4S)	14 (3R <sup>3</sup> , 2S)

(Note) K: number of keynote remarks, R: number of reserved interventions, S: number of spontaneous interventions

2.2 A combination of various unique factors might have contributed to the record-high number of attendance by Ministers and Deputy Ministers. First, the political importance of COVID-19 issues has aroused a particular interest in the Conference by Ministers. Second, the virtual format provided convenience for participants who may not have been able to travel for a variety of reasons. Third, efforts were made to accommodate specific requests from Ministers and to flexibly adjust intervention slots according to their schedules and availabilities. Fourth, emphasizing the need of participation at the Ministerial level with application of strict criteria for attendance by an alternate, might have created an impetus for Ministers’ attendance. Fifth, through proactively approaching States and coordinating closely

<sup>1</sup> An Alternate was able to attend only when a) Minister or Deputy Minister was designated as Chief Delegate in the credentials letter; and/or b) Minister or Deputy Minister would attend either of the three Ministerial Plenary sessions.

<sup>2</sup> Minister from Canada (Host State) who delivered opening remarks during the Plenary is included. One keynote was delivered jointly by Minister with the international organization.

<sup>3</sup> One intervention was made jointly by seven international organizations.

with the point of contacts for Ministers, not only was the communication with States multiplied, but information was also conveyed smoothly to the Ministers.

2.3 Strong interests were also expressed by Ministers, Deputy Ministers and heads of organizations in making interventions, most of whom preferred delivering prepared statements (a total of 56 interventions were reserved in advance and 30 interventions were made spontaneously). In addition, 27 written statements and 21 pre-recorded video statements were submitted prior to the Conference<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore, a number of views were exchanged interactively during the review and adoption of the Declaration. The record-high attendance along with the active interventions and delivery of statements by Ministers and Deputy Ministers has demonstrated their recognition of ICAO's leading role in the transport portfolio and raised the profile of aviation agenda at the political level in many Member States.

### 3. DISCUSSIONS AT THE MINISTERIAL ROUND TABLES

3.1 Three Ministerial Sessions were held, each of which had a unique focus on specific topics and agenda, aiming at formalizing new commitments on aviation recovery, resilience and sustainability (HLCC 2021-WP/1 refers):

- Opening Plenary and Ministerial Round Table I – *Leading Aviation Recovery*;
- Ministerial Round Table II – *Building Resilience and Sustainability*; and
- Closing Ministerial Plenary – *Shaping Political Responses to COVID-19 Challenges*.

3.2 Highlights of the discussions during the Ministerial Plenary Round Tables I and II were captured in the Chair's Summary from the perspective of the President of the Council as the Chairperson of the Ministerial sessions (Appendix A refers), which is available on the Conference website<sup>5</sup>.

3.3 Ministers' statements and interventions focused, inter alia, on: greater-than-expected economic and financial impacts of the pandemic on aviation; importance of the implementation of the recommendations and guidance by the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART); provision of adequate financial and regulatory support measures when deemed necessary; defining multilayer risk management strategies which are adaptable, proportionate, non-discriminatory and guided by scientific evidence; strengthening passengers' confidence in air travel through the promotion of contactless travel using integrated, automated and digitalized solutions; need to address the sustainability in all three aspects – social, environmental and economic beyond the current recovery; strengthening the flexibility and adaptability of aviation to the ongoing, long-term transformation of economies, society and consumer behaviours; retention and attraction of qualified and competent aviation professionals; and global intra- and cross-sectoral cooperation for more prompt and coordinated crisis management.

### 4. MINISTERIAL DECLARATION

4.1 A series of consultations with States and international organizations were conducted prior to and during the Conference. Following extensive discussions at the Ministerial Sessions, the final draft Declaration presented to the Ministerial Plenary (Closing) received broad support, while noting additional

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.icao.int/Meetings/HLCC2021/Pages/statements.aspx>; <https://www.icao.tv/icao-high-level-conference-on-covid-19-hlcc-2021/season:1>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.icao.int/Meetings/HLCC2021/Pages/ministerial-plenary.aspx>

comments on provisions related to climate change and specific national position to testing and/or quarantine requirements for fully-vaccinated or recovered passengers, as well as the recognition of vaccines for international travel. In this regard, the President of the Council clarified that if States face particular circumstances or situations in relation to specific parts of the Declaration, they are encouraged to submit a written statement describing such situations; and that such statement can be published on the Conference website. With this clarification, the Declaration was adopted by acclamation (Appendix B refers). The final adopted Declaration is available on the Conference website<sup>6</sup>.

4.2 Through the Declaration, Ministers were committed to the greatest extent possible, a harmonized and inclusive approach, including alleviating or exempting testing and/or quarantine requirements for fully vaccinated or recovered passengers, taking into account the different circumstances of individual States and their national policies, consistent with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations. They stressed the importance of financial support for sectoral recovery, and the need to address key safety and facilitation priorities as the global air network returns to full operational readiness, while bearing in mind the need to strengthen the sector's resilience to future crisis and address the climate change challenge. Lastly, Ministers also agreed to invite the 41st Session of the ICAO Assembly to review progress and determine further actions that may be needed.

## 5. FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

5.1 The Ministerial Plenary Sessions of the Conference successfully scaled up to the political level of the dialogue on civil aviation, which is often considered as a relatively narrow and sectoral subject within the large and diverse transport portfolio. The record-high number of attendance by Ministerial-level participants, though benefited from various one-time factors as indicated in paragraph 2.2, has signified the strong political will and commitments of States and industry to rebuild the aviation sector from the COVID-19 pandemic as soon as possible.

5.2 While the Declaration was not a legally-binding document, it demonstrated the solidarity and determination, and conveyed a strong political "message" to international communities and world economies. As the first follow-up action, the Ministerial Declaration was disseminated to Member States and international organizations through State letter 2021/70. Continued efforts has been and will be made to promote and raise awareness of the Declaration through dedicated webinars on the outcomes of the Conference and at various ICAO events.

5.3 Increasing the uptake of the Declaration has been identified as a key priority for ICAO in the Business Plan 2023–2025. The Organization will, through a combination of existing budgetary resources and supplemental extra-budgetary contributions : a) provide support and guidance for States to develop multilayer risk management strategies for international civil aviation; b) promote the interoperability and mutual recognition of digital solutions to restore and strengthen the confidence in air travel by the public, governments and international community; c) envisage strengthening the international framework and arrangements for a coordinated and streamlined response to future crises; and d) work with States, financial institutions, international partners and the private sector to support the financial viability of the aviation sector.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.icao.int/Newsroom/Pages/Ministerial-Declaration-of-the-High-level-Conference-on-COVID-19.aspx>

## APPENDIX A



### **Chair's Summary of Ministerial Plenary Round Tables I and II of the ICAO High-level Conference on COVID-19**

The Ministers responsible for civil aviation/transport in Member States of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), as well as the invited Heads of international and industry organizations, gathered at the Ministerial Plenary (Round Tables I and II) from 12 to 13 October 2021 during the ICAO High-level Conference on COVID-19.

Participants held very fruitful discussions virtually over the two days on the two interrelated topics: leading aviation recovery (for Round Table I) and building resilience and sustainability (for Round Table II). The results of the two Round Table discussions were also considered in the preparation of the Ministerial Declaration, to be adopted at the Ministerial Plenary (Closing) on 22 October 2021.

This document captures, from my perspective as a Chairperson of the meeting, highlights of their discussions.

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At the outset, participants acknowledged that the COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis; it has caused immense economic and social distress throughout the globe. While aviation is one of the most heavily affected sectors, global supply chains, emergency and humanitarian responses and the swift vaccine distribution rely predominantly on air transport. Beyond that, aviation is a major economic enabler and catalyst with many sectors depending on the reliable and efficient air transport system.

A global crisis calls for a globally harmonized response. Participants commended the work of the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Task Force (CART) and the Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation (CAPSCA), and underlined the usefulness of recommendations and guidance provided to support their States' recovery efforts. The recommendations of particular mention included the Targeted Exemption system, the lifting of restrictions on air cargo, the establishment of Public Health Corridors, the implementation of testing certificates, and the need for fair and equitable treatment of passengers.

Recognizing the massive impact of the pandemic on the financial viability of the aviation sector, participants stressed the need to continue to provide adequate financial and regulatory support measures when deemed necessary. Such measures should be implemented in an inclusive, targeted, proportionate, transparent, and temporary manner, which shall preserve market dynamics and take into account international obligations. In the face of limited availability of resources for crisis response and competing

priorities, orchestrate efforts are required from all relevant entities, including financial institutions, international partners, and the private sector.

When a State is ready to adopt an “exit” strategy, i.e. a national-wide risk management strategy aimed at reducing the need for public health risk mitigation measures, opening up travel and reactivating local economies, the aviation sector requires particular attention. Confronting difficult trade-offs associated with health, economic and social challenges, the crucial role of aviation to support the fight against the pandemic and wider economic recovery should be taken into account. A shared view was expressed by participants as to the utmost importance of defining multilayer risk management strategies for international civil aviation which are adaptable, proportionate, non-discriminatory and guided by scientific evidence.

Restoring and strengthening passengers’ confidence in air travel is essential to the full resumption of travel, trade and supply chains and their post-pandemic growth. In this regard, a speedier and safer contactless travel should be promoted while satisfying public health measures and reducing risk of disease transmission. Participants highlighted the benefits of integrating automated and digitalized solutions in air transport operations to ensure fast and secure exchange of data and information. The interoperability and mutual recognition of, and accessibility to such solutions is a core enabling component for achieving this objective. In addition, new technologies can allow governments to develop consistent and agile response frameworks to future crises, including flight restrictions, crew treatment measures, passenger testing and vaccination requirements, travel health data exchange, and other emergency response.

Participants also discussed the emerging shifts engendered by the impact of the pandemic and highlighted their actions and initiatives to enhance the sustainability of aviation in all three aspects – social, environmental and economic. There was a shared view that lessons should be drawn from the current pandemic in order to reinforce the long-term foundation of the aviation sector against future threats, while acknowledging that every crisis holds an element of uncertainty and unpredictability. Moreover, they stressed the importance of strengthening the sectors’ flexibility and adaptability to the ongoing, long-term transformation of economies, society and consumer behaviours. States’ and ICAO’s key responsibility is to prepare a proper post-COVID-19 policy response, which will rely on improved risk management and crisis preparedness, underpinned by innovative solutions such as digitalization.

A significant component of the way forward will be the retention and attraction of qualified and competent aviation professionals to effectively respond to the ongoing change of economies, operations and business models, and for the sustainable growth of the aviation sector.

Collective engagement of States and industry serves as the main engine to navigate aviation through the course of recovery to resilience. Participants agreed to seize this opportunity to strengthen the international framework and arrangements for a coordinated and streamlined response to future crises, and to renew global intra- and cross-sectoral cooperation for more prompt and coordinated crisis management.

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I am very pleased to see the strong and robust unity of Ministers to address these challenges and to enable the swift but safe and efficient recovery of civil aviation. I highly appreciate the valuable contributions of participants.

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## APPENDIX B

### Ministerial Declaration of the High-level Conference on COVID-19

#### “One Vision for Aviation Recovery, Resilience and Sustainability beyond the Global Pandemic”

(Adopted at the Ministerial Plenary (Closing) on 22 October 2021)

We, the Ministers;

- Recognizing the continued, unprecedented global crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its serious public health, social and economic consequences;
- Recognizing also that the civil aviation sector is profoundly affected, including employment by renewed outbreaks and resulting travel restrictions, thus hampering global mobility, including of key air transport personnel as well as essential connectivity and supply chains, with a heavy strain on the global economy;
- Recognizing further the key role played by the operation of cargo air services, allowing for the global distribution of critical medical supplies and keeping the essential supply chains in operation;
- Underlining that ICAO’s top and immediate priority is to enhance the cooperation among States to enable the safe and efficient recovery of civil aviation while managing risks to public health;
- Stressing the need to ensure the resilience and sustainability of civil aviation as an irreversible path towards recovery, inclusive growth and addressing the climate change challenge;
- Emphasizing that all passengers should benefit from fair and equitable treatment and the ability to travel, and that vaccination is not a precondition for travel although it is highly desirable that it be used to safely facilitate mobility;
- Underlining that travelling solutions should be made available to or be appropriate for all passengers, taking into consideration access to and types of vaccines, so as to ensure that no country is left behind in the global aviation recovery effort;
- Recalling that all States are sovereign and responsible for their own domestic public health-related measures, and remain free to implement any risk mitigation measures if and when necessary, consistent with their national legislation and international obligations;
- Supporting the work of the ICAO Council Aviation Recovery Taskforce (CART) and stressing the importance of common standards for travel, including interoperability and mutual recognition of digital applications, as well as the importance of drawing lessons from the current pandemic to better manage future crises; and
- Noting with appreciation the World Health Organization’s (WHO) partnership on public health risk management in the aviation sector throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including on vaccine certification and considering the conclusions from the Safety and Facilitation Streams of the Conference;

**Have adopted the following Declaration:**

1. We welcome ICAO's global leadership to facilitate aviation's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and ensure its future resilience;
2. We commit to taking effective measures to prevent the spread of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 and other communicable diseases by international air travel, in particular through the implementation of the ICAO CART guidelines, and encourage the harmonization of Member States' multilayer risk management strategies to safely restore international connectivity and support the revival of the global economy as a critical step towards achieving our goal to enhance the social, environmental and economic sustainability of aviation;
3. We also commit to a multilayer risk management strategy for international civil aviation, which is adaptable, proportionate, non-discriminatory and guided by scientific evidence in close cooperation and coordination with public health sector, with agreed practices harmonized to the greatest extent possible, for air travel purposes, using commonly accepted epidemiological criteria, testing requirements and vaccination, and underpinned by regular review, monitoring and timely information-sharing among States;
4. We will facilitate further the air transportation of vaccines as well as essential medical supplies and personnel in support of the global effort to combat the COVID-19 pandemic as well as other crises and emergencies, particularly to developing countries;
5. We confirm the importance of support provided for the aviation sector, including economic and financial support, to sustain operations and ensure the provision of essential services while safeguarding fair competition and equal opportunities;
6. We commit to ensuring a safe, secure, and orderly flow of traffic with operational readiness of aviation personnel, in particular aircrew and air traffic controllers, as well as the airworthiness of aircraft;
7. We will work with ICAO and other stakeholders to ensure the interoperability and mutual recognition of, and accessibility to, digital applications, secure transmission and validation of pandemic-related testing, vaccination and recovery certification that protects privacy and personal data;
8. We commit to promoting, to the greatest extent possible, a harmonized and inclusive approach to facilitate safe international air travel, including alleviating or exempting testing and/or quarantine requirements for fully vaccinated or recovered passengers, taking into account the different circumstances of individual States and their national policies, in keeping with WHO's policy and technical considerations for implementing a risk-based approach to international travel in the context of COVID-19<sup>7</sup>, and providing exceptions for non-vaccinated passengers. This will enable us to work towards strengthening the confidence of the travelling public and safely rebuilding international civil aviation;

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Risk-based-international-travel-2021.1>, stating that "... national authorities in countries of destination ... may consider exempting from SARS-CoV-2 testing and/or quarantine requirements to incoming international travellers who:

- are fully vaccinated, meaning they have received the last recommended dose of a vaccine against COVID-19 listed by WHO for emergency use or approved by a stringent regulatory authority at least two weeks prior to travelling;
- have proof of previous SARS-CoV-2 infection confirmed by a real-time reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction (rRT-PCR) test received within the past 6 months and are no longer infectious as per WHO's criteria for releasing COVID-19 patients from isolation."

9. We commit to working with international partners to build upon ICAO and WHO guidance on the establishment of bilateral, regional or multilateral Public Health Corridors, or other types of agreements or arrangements to similar effect, in particular regarding the mutual recognition of vaccines, and incorporating additional risk mitigation as required;
10. We welcome ICAO's work in close collaboration with WHO to provide guidance on an exit strategy from existing risk management measures as the pandemic retreats;
11. We commit to ensuring that ICAO is well positioned to support the long-term resilience of international aviation and incorporate the lessons learned from the current and past pandemics, by enhancing its crisis response capability, and regularly reviewing and updating ICAO's Standards and Recommended Practices and guidance materials as may be required;
12. We recognize the contribution of the aviation industry to climate change and the challenges posed by the latter to the long-term resilience, sustainable development and future growth of the aviation sector, as we look forward to the 26<sup>th</sup> United Nations Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP 26)<sup>8</sup> and the ICAO High-level Meeting to discuss the feasibility of a long-term global aspirational goal for international aviation<sup>9</sup>;
13. We further recognize the importance of developing mechanisms to assist and provide technical aviation support to States and their professionals in overcoming the COVID 19 pandemic leaving no one behind; and
14. We commit to uniting together to rebuild the aviation sector from the COVID-19 pandemic as soon as possible, and invite the 41st Session of the ICAO Assembly to review progress and determine further actions that may be needed.

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<sup>8</sup> To be held in Glasgow, United Kingdom from 31 October to 12 November 2021.

<sup>9</sup> To be held at ICAO from 20 to 22 July 2022.