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ASSEMBLY — 41ST SESSION

PLENARY

Agenda Item 8: Statements by delegations of Member States

STATEMENT BY SAINT LUCIA

(Presented by Saint Lucia)

Theme: “Reconnecting the World – Committing to Strategic Pillars of Safety, Security and Leaving No One Behind”

Madame President - the distinguished first-ever woman presiding officer – Ms. Poppy Khoza, ICAO President Salvatore Sciacchitano, ICAO Secretary General -Juan Carlos Salazar, Members of the ICAO Council, distinguished delegates, Airline industry partners and stakeholders, specially invited guests, media and colleagues.

It is my honour to extend on behalf Prime Minister Philip J. Pierre and Civil Aviation Minister Alva Baptiste, the heartiest of congratulations to Assembly President Poppy Khoza on her signal achievement as the first woman ever elected President of the ICAO Assembly, and arising therefrom, as among the most effective, efficient, and excellent presiding officers, I have ever encountered in an international arena. Madame President, you have conducted the proceedings at our ICAO 41st Assembly with professional aplomb, dexterity, democracy, discipline, and dignity.

Saint Lucia is a small developing island state in the Eastern Caribbean, with a miniscule population (180,000) and land mass (238 square miles) compared to most ICAO members. Our primary resources are our natural environment and our people or human capital. Tourism is the economic engine which feeds and clothes our people, provides them with shelter and educates them to participate sustainably in the development of our nation. However, the growth and success of tourism depends on the availability of appropriate aviation linkages and assets, as well as the absence of adverse natural and man-made disasters. The Covid-19 Pandemic has therefore dealt a debilitating blow to our Tourism industry in the Eastern Caribbean. In addition, we are threatened every year with destructive hurricanes and other disasters like flooding and land-slippages, exacerbated by climate change.

Given our limited resources, Saint Lucia and the other five (5) nation states comprising the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), have set up the Eastern Caribbean Civil Aviation Authority (ECCAA) to manage and oversee civil aviation in the sub-region. ECCAA is unique within the ICAO as it is the only Civil Aviation Authority which oversees the aviation of six (6) independent states, namely: Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

ECCAA was established and can operate primarily through the vision and institutional architecture agreed to by our leaders in 1981 when they created the OECS. There are fifteen (15) currently commissioned airports in the ECCAA jurisdiction including: 2 in Antigua and Barbuda, 2 in Dominica, 2 in Grenada, 2 in St. Kitts and Nevis, 2 in Saint Lucia, and 5 in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Although not under its oversight, ECCAA also provides maintenance services at airports in the non-independent OECS members of Anguilla, British Virgin Islands and Montserrat.

Some time ago, our jurisdiction received a downgrade by the Federal Aviation Administration of the United States from Category 1 to Category 2 and we are working assiduously to regain category 1 status by 2023. The support of ICAO and others to this process is critical and so we launch an open appeal for assistance in all required areas, including the institutional architecture of ECCAA, the physical infrastructure of our airports and the ECCAA Secretariat, and the navigational, security, safety and weather equipment at our airports. It is also critical, that regular, appropriate and up-to-date training be provided for staff at all levels (Airports, Civil Aviation Ministries, ECCAA) to ensure that we maintain category 1 status when we regain it.

Saint Lucia is small, but Saint Lucia proud. We proudly celebrate our international intellectual prowess with Sir Arthur Lewis being the Nobel Laureate for Economics in 1979, the year of our Independence; and Sir Derek Walcott winning the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992. We believe in the peaceful co-existence of states and the resolution of disputes through dialogue and discussion, not isolation and coercion. We subscribe to the core principles of CARICOM solidarity as expressed by the late Errol Barrow, former Prime Minister of Barbados: “Friends of All, Satellites of None.”

As small nations we consider ourselves part of the collective conscience of the ICAO, especially when countries with political and economic might attempt to subordinate the technical and democratic mandate of the ICAO. A Saint Lucian General Jean Baptiste Bideau rode alongside Liberator Simon Bolivar in the South American struggles for Independence, and he is reputed to have saved Bolivar’s life on at least one (1) occasion. Another Saint Lucian Darren Sammy captained the West Indies Cricket Team to two (2) successive T20 World Cup Championships in 2012 and 2016.

In the honest humility of both Bideau and Sammy, I appeal to the ICAO to take the following urgent actions:

1. Immediately include Taipei CAA (Taiwan) in all ICAO deliberations and decision-making bodies in keeping with the important ICAO pillars of safety, security and no one left behind. The Taipei CAA is a significant component of the Asia Pacific aviation architecture, and its exclusion from direct participation in ICAO is an unacceptable risk to aviation safety and security which cannot be justified on technical grounds.
2. Immediately return to its technical mandate and make every effort legally and otherwise to exclude the weaving of any political manoeuvrings into the business of the ICAO. The business of the ICAO is too important to allow it to be contaminated and compromised by the political agendas of world power brokers. The ICAO Assembly must concern itself exclusively with the urgent aviation matters which confront members and must never be used as an arena for the political sanctioning of members.

On this note, I again congratulate Assembly President Poppy Khoza on her achievement and performance, and I thank ICAO President Salvatore Sciacchitano and Secretary General Juan Carlos Salazar and Secretariat staff for their warm facilitation.