

Virtual Roundtable promoted by ICAO and Government of Ecuador and FAA
to provide their perspectives on COVID-19

A meeting convened by Mr. Fabio Rabbani, Regional Director of ICAO

Date: April 15th, 2020

Participants:

1. Comdr. Anyelo Acosta, Director General of Civil Aviation of Ecuador (AAC)
2. Mr. Nicholas Reyes, Regional Director of federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

Fabio Rabbani, RD ICAO, says: Greetings to all our listeners. We are here at the South American Regional Office of the International Civil Aviation Organization, promoting a Virtual Round Table. My name is Fabio Rabbani, I am the Regional Director of the office, and today we have some very special guests with us. They will give us their views and outlook on the current situation regarding the Covid-19 crisis. We have Commander Anyelo Acosta, Director General of Civil Aviation of Ecuador, and we also have Mr. Nicolas Reyes, Regional Director of the FAA, the Federal Aviation Administration.

In this context, what we know, is that as a result of this outbreak, a number of health measures, regarded as necessary, have been adopted in order to guarantee the protection of public health and that the message to close down borders has caused a great impact on civil aviation. In South America, most of our countries have decided to close down all their borders, in view of which, the aviation authorities have taken some actions in order to face the situation in the best possible manner, and at the same time, find the best way to adopt future actions that may lead to the resumption of aviation activities. Therefore, I would like to start this talk by giving the floor to Director Anyelo Acosta, who would tell us about the decisions made so far and their impact, then he will also give us his view of the future.

Sir, in your opinion, have the measures, the actions taken by Ecuador, allowed you to do your work in order to guarantee that aviation at this point may not be regarded as a vector that spreads this disease? What is the take of society, and what is your opinion of the actions taken so far?

Comdr. Anyelo Acosta, ACC Ecuador, says: Good afternoon Fabio, thank you very much for this invitation, and I will also like to thank all the other participants, I am Anyelo Acosta, Director General of Civil Aviation as Fabio has already said. Regarding your question, what I could say is that some measures have been adopted by the Civil Aviation Administration of Ecuador, together with several Ministries, such as the Ministry of Governance, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Tourism, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The Armforces, and, obviously, Civil Aviation. In the beginning, we faced several difficulties, and we still have them.

Something important that should be highlighted is that people have not been paying too much attention to the orders given by the Government, and consequently, the virus has been spreading very rapidly in some cities, some provinces. In view of all this, the COE, that is, the Emergency Operation Center, has

had to make some decisions and those decisions have affected aviation as well. Decisions like prohibiting certain types of operations, suspending international flights, local flights, private flights, charter flights, so we have been learning along the way, as we go from one stage to the next. As we see what is happening in other countries.

As Fabio very well said at the beginning, Ecuador was one of the first countries in South America to begin to close down its borders, and we began to close down our borders because we were actually observing what was going on in other countries, and we wanted to move ahead, knowing what we wanted to avoid. Obviously, always following the recommendations and based on the experiences of our neighbours, of people who have already gone through all these. But we are still there, and we are learning more and more each day. We have tried to reactivate humanitarian flights to bring back Ecuadorian citizens and at the same time, as the Civil Aviation Administration, to facilitate the exit of foreigners who for some reason, ended up stuck here in Ecuador.

However, we have been having a lot of difficulties when making all these decisions. Difficulties because the people who come back to Ecuador have not received clear information about the conditions in which they are coming and about what to do when they arrive. Things like doing the APO, that it's the mandatory preventive confinement. Everyone who gets into Ecuadorian territory must remain in mandatory confinement for fourteen days; this confinement has been agreed upon jointly by the ministry of public health and the ministry of tourism. The decision is to take them to some hotels, but that also means that you have to have more personnel to control them, so they won't leave the hotels, so they actually stay there. And we have had problems because people do not follow the rules and that has an impact on aviation because then, the COE decides to suspend all flights and that is when we get into a difficult situation because not everybody knows that. Sure, Civil aviation authorizes the flights, but it is not in charge of getting humanitarian flights. It is not up to us to contact the airlines that will bring and take passengers, and that is why people are shocked, they do not really know what the mission of civil aviation is, nor do they know what the mission of each agency involved is, so what I have seen is that aviation has been badly hit by this kind of misinformation. Because of this lack of knowledge, in spite of the fact that aviation is an important pillar, it is not well seen by some users. They think that aviation has not done enough to bring back all those who are still out of the country, obviously, we feel limited, because we can't be providing information through official channels or social media so people may have a better understanding of the role of aviation in all this. And I think that many of these things may also be happening in other countries. Well, this is what is happening here in Ecuador.

Fabio Rabbani, RD ICAO, says: Quite right, Commander Anyelo, I think that the situation you have just described is also taking place in some other countries. The change of circumstances, the measures adopted, and the quick way in which Ecuador reacted to the situation. The issue of humanitarian flights is something we have seen throughout the whole region. We have seen some substantial level of cooperation between countries, the kind of cooperation that has shown that this period of collaboration must continue in the next steps we are about to take. These problems society has been facing and the role of aviation authorities, these are the things we have also seen in several countries. I think that you have given us a good overview of the circumstances being faced by a large number of aviation authorities.

Nick, to get the regional overview, I would like to give you the floor because your office has the responsibility of coordinating actions with the countries in the Americas. I imagine you have had a lot of

work to do there at the initial moment, both to understand the circumstances and to coordinate the actions of the FAA has had to adopt in response to the initial measures related to the outbreak. But you also had to see how to support other countries in order to guarantee the sustainability of aviation throughout time. I now give you the floor Nick, so you can share with us some of your thoughts.

Mr. Nicholas Reyes, FAA, says: Fabio, Commander Anyelo; first of all, I will like to commend you on the efforts you are making in your countries and thank you for the support you have given to the FAA and the American airlines that have been making humanitarian flights to almost all the countries in central and South American during this crisis. The support we had received in all aspects has been excellent and I would personally like to thank you on behalf of the FAA for all the support we have received. Fabio, I congratulate you on this initiative because it is so important and necessary to make sure we are looking at a future, hopefully, a near future, when we can start getting ready to re-establish this industry, which is so important for the economy and for the whole world, and here I mean the aviation industry. The crisis we are going through is unprecedented; if we look back in history, what we see, basically, are crises of different magnitude affecting different regions in the world or different specific countries. However, this crisis, this epidemic, is a world crisis that has affected and still affects every country in the world. It is commendable to see all the energy, the resources, the interest, the decisions that have been adopted by a host of countries. However, my focus is on the western hemisphere, which is the area we are working in; Canada, the United States, Mexico, Central America, South America and the Caribbean. All the internal coordination that has taken place between in the various countries in order to make decisions has been critical to stop, or slow down, this epidemic that is spreading in every country.

There are many lessons to be learnt, of course, as I said, this is an unprecedented crisis and we are going to draw some lessons after all this, as we have learned from many other crises. Moreover, in the future, we will be in a better position to cope with another crisis like this one, but the important thing is, in my opinion, that the interest shown by every Civil Aviation Organization in this hemisphere is not only to cover the internal needs of their respective countries but also to support other neighbouring countries, the region, and the whole world. As Commander Anyelo pointed out, this last week we have all been busy organizing repatriation flights and, once again, I appreciate all the support we have received.

We, too have been giving our support, and as the Federal Administration here in Washington DC, we have been supporting all the requests for repatriation flights from all the countries in the hemisphere. The FAA has made a large number of decisions to fight this epidemic, to stop it, to slow it down in the aviation industry, but, I will stop here for now, I don't know whether this is the right moment to start talking about these decisions, these actions the FAA has undertaken to fight this crisis, but we are going to share them, in fact, Chuck Ashley sent a letter to the president of ICAO describing some, some, not all the decisions made by the FAA, not only regarding operations, but also regarding airports, air traffic control, air certifications, licenses, waivers, and some other critical authorizations. They do make a lot of sense in our efforts to fight the situation we are all in, but once again, Fabio, I congratulate you on your decision to hold this meeting. I know that in other regions of ICAO people are working in similar meetings, similar boards, including in South America, the Caribbean and other regions in the world. I know this because some of my colleagues' directors in Asia-Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and Africa have told me that they are holding this kind of meetings all over the world, so we must start doing the same thing here in our countries, in our region. I'm going to stop now Fabio, so you may continue with your program.

Fabio Rabbani, RD ICAO, says: Thank you very much, Nicolas, I think you have touched upon a very important aspect, which is, that we must be ready for a potential new outbreak or an outbreak of the same outbreak, moreover, that the lessons we have learned should help us figure out how to avoid a major impact on aviation because we do not want the system to be left without a lifeline and here I think we should mention something that is very important for us, that the idea here is not to arrive at any type of commitment, but rather, to discuss issues we have to identify and maybe find some paths, some ways that may be used as examples for other States and other actors in the system. Therefore, something I would like us to discuss here is about the pillars. If you could select two or three priorities at this point, where there is no longer a health emergency demanding the borders shut down or when aviation is not prevented from operating, which will these priorities be? Anyelo, could you please share with us your thoughts about who should be included in these initiatives and priorities to resume our activities and operations? Anyelo, please.

Comdr. Anyelo Acosta, ACC Ecuador, says: Well, my dear Fabio, before answering your question, I would like us to have a clear understanding of a few things. To some extent, the problems we have had have been due to this global pandemic, we have witnessed how these difficulties were gradually developing in other regions, in other states, and there we see that what is happening to us has already happened in other countries and that we had not become aware of that. I'm afraid it is going to be very difficult to resume our aviation activities, to go back to what we had a few months ago, and even to what we had just a month ago. However, I think all our organizations must work altogether, we should all be talking in the same language to see how we are going to be resuming all these. We are still having some issues and we do not have an exact date yet as to when we are going to be getting on with all our activities. One thing I am sure of is that we are trying to move ahead. As it has always been the case, the aviation industry has always made its plans for the next ten, fifteen years, but now, under these circumstances, it is very hard to do that, take into account everything that has been lost in aviation, companies, pilots, jobs, we even need to regain the confidence of passengers so they may want to fly again. I think that this is going to be very hard. Many options are being discussed; like having aircraft with fewer seats, with more space between passengers, this will definitely change the whole outlook for aviation.

We are now trying to look ahead, to see how the industry will respond to reopen our industry, at least in Ecuador. I have been talking with some contacts, getting information, talking with pilots, with airline operators, with training centers, discussing some options that may be offered to the industry, facilities that may be given to operators, related to medical certificates, operations licenses, AOCs, the time frame to restart their activities, and so forth, that is to give them some assistance so that they can resume their normal aviation activities, but I still find it very complicated. However, we will have to learn as we go, gradually, as we begin to see how the various operations are reactivated. It is also very important to bear in mind that airports should be operational whenever these emergencies occur. It is the fastest means of communication, though not many people give aviation due importance. In fact, some people do not think of aviation as that important. In our country aviation depends on the State and sometimes we do not have enough resources. Aviation is not considered a business or a service activity; to some extent, there are certain actors who regard it as one more business or one more Ministry, when it shouldn't be like that. Maybe we should all get together so that the whole world can regard it as fully autonomous. It is going to take time, but it is the only way to be all in sync. All role players in aviation should make decisions

based on consensus so that it all may be replicated, enabling us to resume our aviation activities after any event that may arise, not only after this one.

I am completely sure that this is going to happen again after another event, I do not mean this very same pandemic, but there will always be a major event that will shake us up and give us the opportunity to improve, to avoid making the same mistakes we have made over and over again due to different circumstances.

Fabio Rabbani, RD ICAO, says:

Indeed, my dear Anyelo, I think you have mentioned something very critical, such as understanding the importance of aviation, if, as you said in the beginning, what we want is to generate some confidence in order to resume our activities, then, we must make people understand what aviation is doing to secure the resumption of public aviation activities, if we do not do this, then it would be very hard to take merely technical or even just political measures to solve this problem. We must do so by conveying the right message and using an effective communication method in this whole process to reach society. I think these are very important matters. Now, I give the floor to Nick so he can share with us what he thinks about all this. We will like to know how we can prioritize some actions, which are the most important issues to take into account in this resumption process, and how the FAA in its major role within the aviation system can assist countries in the region during this process. Nick, please, if you may?

Mr. Nicholas Reyes, FAA, says: Thank you Fabio, I fully agree and I reiterate what Commander Anyelo said, however, I would like to add a couple of issues, not only that, but I would also like to highlight what Commander Anyelo describe as essential. When we start operating, whether this is over or not, but when we get to a point where the risk of starting aeronautical operations in moving passengers both domestically and throughout the whole world gets down to an acceptable level, there would be a couple of issues that would have to be taken into account.

The first issue is going to be, in my opinion, and Fabio, you mentioned this a couple of times, the health program, it is going to be a great challenge to be able to have, to set, harmonized processes and procedures in the whole region and in the world. To meet the regulations given by the health department of each country, letting you bring passengers from country A to country B and then when they get to country B to have the right procedures in place to receive those passengers. We want screening procedures clearly established, procedures that may comply with the requirements of the various countries in the region, so that when passengers leave country A, after following all its procedures, and they arrive in country B, they may disembark without any problem and then proceed with businesses.

Fear is going to be a factor that would be very hard to overcome. I mean, after this global quarantine, many people will be thinking over and over again whether or not to jump into a plain and to go from point A to point B. This will have an economic impact on the aviation industry that was having an unprecedented growth rate, and then, all of a sudden, this growth not only stopped, but we have seen that the economic growth of airlines and operators throughout the whole world has shrunk. Consequently, operators, maintenance companies and the like will have to rethink, reestablish, get organized and make decisions that would affect the way they were doing business pre-COVID-19.

In my opinion, all these aspects would have to be taken into account when we start operating. Harmonization is of the essence. The United States, or any other country for that matter, can set some procedures or processes to board and disembark passengers, mobilize aircraft, authorize flights, but if we are not harmonized at a regional level, if we are not harmonized at a global level, that would be a problem, because how would an airline be able to do its marketing strategy to fly to different countries if those procedures are not clearly established. We must work jointly, that is, we must work jointly as of now. That is why coordination is so important so that when we resume operations, we may already have a roadmap of the actions to take and then we will be able to start working together in an effective manner. Now you go ahead Fabio.

Fabio Rabbani, RD ICAO, says: Thank you very much, Nick, for bringing up the most important things that must be taken into account to restart operations and satisfy all the sanitary requirements. We need to see how to harmonize these procedures so that Aviation may really work and we do not end having a lot of different standards and requirements from different countries, thus generating more costs and uncertainty for passengers, who will not know how they will be able to travel, that is something that can create many problems and the discussion of these issues will be a waste of time if by the end of the day we do not realize the decisions will have to be made jointly, it would be something terrible for the system.

Very well, I think we have heard some very interesting comments from our guests. First off, we have been able to realize that each country, each state, each sector, has its own challenges, but at the same time, they face several common challenges. We have also heard about the role we have as States, as industry associations, as an industry itself, and even ICAO itself as a multilateral organization. The idea was to use this time, now that we cannot operate, to start up this dialogue to build up a path in a coordinated and collaborative manner. And now, I would like to give the floor to Commander Anyelo, asking him to give us his final thoughts, not before thanking him for his availability. Commander, please.

Comdr. Anyelo Acosta, ACC Ecuador, says: Thank you. I think it is important to keep having these chats, these talks, to keep the dialogue open, to discuss what we are currently living. I think that ICAO is very important for the whole industry because it gives us some guidelines that can help us face the various situations that may be coming up. It is also a good way to get some feedback from our colleagues from other countries, while we, in turn, can provide some information about what is happening to each one of us. I think keeping the dialogue, the communication, learning about what is happening to the others, is of the essence because we all have one thing in common, Aviation.

We want aviation to be more dynamic, to be fully available to our users. To have that, it is obvious that we need to help each other in the aviation industry. I am fully convinced of that. Fabio, thank you very much for this invitation and for this great initiative, which strengthens us and gives us more tools to keep on working in something we love Aviation. Thank you Fabio.

Fabio Rabbani, RD ICAO, says: Thank you very much, Commander. Thank you for your kind words. Rest assure that ICAO is at your disposal to guarantee that actions are properly coordinated to provide mutual support for the benefit of all society.

Nick, along the same lines, I thank you as well for dedicating your time to participate in this talk at this very crucial moment.

Mr. Nicholas Reyes, FAA, says: Thank you Fabio. As the Commander said, it is very important to start having these talks and keep having them until we overcome this crisis, we are learning new things every day. This has been a critical experience, one with enormous consequences, because of the number of lives lost, the number of people whose health has been affected and the number of people who have suffered other consequences. The impact on the economy and in our daily lives, the impact on the aviation industry has been enormous as well. Therefore, we must work in harmony. These kinds of initiatives have to be structured in a certain way and, as the Commander said, ICAO as a world leader, has taken up the initiative of beginning to have these talks at a regional level; however, they should be done in a harmonized and structured manner. We need to start documenting the lessons learnt, the issues that deserve immediate attention if we want to start restoring the aviation industry globally. These meetings, and all structured documentation, will help us understand what the countries are doing in the world, in the region, in the hemisphere, so they will help us harmonized the way we start to use issuing authorizations for aeronautical operations, both domestically and globally. This is just the beginning.

However, we need to take into account that the moment when we get out of this crisis and the way in which we get out of it, will vary from country to country, so the more information we have, the more effective we will be as aeronautical organizations, and I not only mean governments, I also mean international organizations, ICAO, airline organizations such as ALTA, world organizations such as IATA, and others such as the LACAC, other regional organizations, and the like. All of us, and all these types of organizations, will have a different input and a different workstyle. Nevertheless, they all play a key role in the restoration of our industry. In my personal opinion, this is going to be a lengthy process, because the whole aviation industry has practically come to a hold. Fortunately, humanitarian and cargo flights are still being allowed, as well as some other types of operations. But, if we compare the number of pre-Covid19 operations to the current number, we will notice an amazing drop, so we have a lot to learn. The faster we learn, the more we make information available to all these organizations and to all our governments; the more effective we will be in reaching our goal, God willing, which is to recover the levels we had before this crisis, though, I think, it will take us much longer.

Once again, Fabio, I will like to thank ICAO SAM for this initiative, as I said before, ICAO NACC and other ICAO organizations are doing the same. I will like to thank Commander Anyelo as well for his wise input. This should just be the beginning of a process; we will have to follow if we want this initiative to be effective in the region and in the world. Thank you Fabio.

Fabio Rabbani, RD ICAO, says: Thank you very much Nick. Well, I think that with these final considerations, now I will like to thank our guests for their time. I know that you are extremely busy with so many activities you have to do now remotely, sometimes even without having access to our own offices. It is very important that you, your families, and your teams stay healthy and well protected from this terrible disease that has affected all men kind. I repeat the core message here, collaboration, coordination, communication, this is something that is of the essence in this process, so that aviation may be kept alive and may satisfy the immediate needs of society, and here we are talking about air cargo, we are talking about humanitarian flights, we are talking about medical evacuation, they are critical to

keeping aviation alive, so that we may be able to go back to our activities as soon as the health conditions and procedures are well established.

This recording and other recordings that we are doing will be posted on ICAO SAM website (www.icao.int/sam), and there you will also find a lot of information about the measures that are being adopted by ICAO regarding COVID-19.

Thank you very much to all of you, may we all stay healthy and with our families.

The end