



**Keynote remarks
by the Secretary General
of the International Civil Aviation Organization,
Dr. Fang Liu,
to the *Routes Reconnected* Conference on
*“Bringing together the global route development
community to stimulate recovery”***

(Hybrid Event, 30 November - 4 December 2020)

1. COVID-19’s aviation impacts have imperiled businesses and threatened the livelihoods of millions of people all over the world.
2. Landlocked and island nations have been especially hard hit, but in point of fact these profound and cascading negative effects on transport, tourism, and hospitality markets are being felt in all countries, everywhere.
3. ICAO has been very vocal in keeping these factors at the forefront of government and UN system consideration.
4. And ICAO has been constantly stressing the pandemic’s threats to the basic sustainability of international air transport.
5. We know that airlines are still facing dramatically reduced load factors, and that a resurgence of COVID-19 is now taking place across much of the northern hemisphere.
6. We know that airlines cannot service routes, and keep the world connected, by managing flights without the passengers who make them financially viable.
7. And with our ICAO forecasts now estimating a 60% reduction in 2020 passenger totals, we know that these threats to your financial viability pose cascading risks for travel, tourism, business and civil societies in many areas of socio-economic and sustainable development.

8. This is the case because a world not connected by scheduled flights is a world where countries will face serious challenges to their short- and long-term needs for fresh fruits and vegetables, vaccines and medical supplies, and many other perishable and high-value goods.
9. E-commerce activity, which is highly reliant on air cargo services, and which has been a beacon of economic growth during the pandemic period, would also become seriously and globally constrained.
10. Suppliers will become disconnected from producers, and producers from markets, leading to further millions of job losses globally and the contraction of tax bases for national planners.
11. Also at risk would be our collective global capacity to reconnect the world, and lift it into economic recovery, once COVID-19 is finally behind us.

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12. It was because of the seriousness of these risks that ICAO responded so rapidly to address the pandemic.
13. The special guidelines, resources, and monitoring and coordination mechanisms we've established, for both operators and governments, continue to play an essential daily role in keeping cargo supply chains functioning and all operations safe for both travelers and crew.
14. At the Council level of ICAO we also established the 'Take-off' recovery guidelines for air transport, and I wish to highlight the participation of international industry groups in their development, and in the success they're achieving among many countries and operators.
15. In the new *Phase II* version of the aviation recovery Take-off Guidelines, it is now recommended that, where medically prudent, countries should consider and evaluate COVID-19 testing for passengers using the new *Testing and Cross-border Risk Management Measures Manual*.
16. This document benefitted from WHO and very broad-based government and industry contributions, and we are proud to have realized and delivered it so quickly for States and operators.

17. From an overall standpoint, the CART Take-off Guidelines are achieving a very positive degree of overall system alignment.
18. One bright spot we have registered in monitoring their success relates to their encouragement for countries to establish public health corridors between specific international destinations.
19. Among the cities where these have now been set out, we're seeing the first indications of traveler confidence being revived. That's very hopeful progress in my estimation.
20. Another factor we've registered through our monitoring is that areas with higher levels of intra-regional connectivity are proving more resilient to COVID-19's effects.
21. These insights underscore that governments and industry must continue to work closely together through ICAO in order to identify and build off these recovery best practices, and the intra-regional connectivity aspects have critical air route considerations as well.
22. This reminds us that international air routes require extensive bilateral or multilateral negotiation and diplomatic agreement among countries, and it's an important aspect of ICAO's role to provide the forums where those activities take place.
23. Routes conferences also play an important part in this process, and they have always been strongly related and supportive to the objectives of ICAO's 'ICAN' Air Services Negotiation Events.
24. It's more important than ever right now to remember that we are one sector, working together, and that our continued solidarity and cooperation will be critical to overcoming this crisis.

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25. Ladies and gentlemen, as we continue to battle COVID-19 and its dire traffic effects, the economic sustainability of air transport is a critical concern at this time.
26. At the same time however, we must continue to actively pursue our priorities and targets for aviation safety, security, efficiency and environmental sustainability.

27. This includes the pressing airspace and aircraft capacity concerns which were afflicting many air transport markets pre-COVID-19, and the new safety risks posed by operators struggling with diminishing financial and human resources.
28. There is also the strong global expectation that we will build back better post-pandemic, both in terms of aviation's emissions and its overall impacts and contributions to ecological sustainability.
29. ICAO has welcomed recent commitments by some airline groups to achieve net zero CO2 emissions by 2050, and through our Council, countries are continuing to keep the CORSIA offsetting framework on track for its Pilot Phase which begins next year.
30. Innovation will be critical to all of our objectives going forward, both to make air transport more resilient in the face of future pandemic threats, and to safely integrate the incredible new developments taking place in autonomous, unmanned, sub orbital, and supersonic flight.
31. Artificial intelligence, blockchain, and many other innovative technologies will also be a big part of this evolution, and it will require significant changes to how regulators and standards setters assess and adopt new innovations for global benefit.
32. I have made innovation a center point of my priorities at ICAO, including in terms of reviewing and refining our own internal processes.
33. Our governing Council is also now establishing a high-level forum on innovation with industry leaders, and these activities should remind us that we are ushering in an entirely new era in powered flight even as we confront this dire threat to our traditional operations.
34. They also remind us that people love to fly, and to be flown, and that long after the pandemic is behind us aircraft will continue to connect us, and our world.
35. Thank you, and I wish you very productive discussions.