



OPENING REMARKS BY THE ICAO SECRETARY GENERAL,
MR. RAYMOND BENJAMIN
TO THE MOROCCO HIGH-LEVEL ECONOMIC FORUM
(ICAO HQ, 3 February 2014)

1. Good morning ladies and gentlemen,
2. On behalf of the International Civil Aviation Organization, it's my great pleasure to welcome you to this High-level Economic Forum, a somewhat unique event which has been organized here in ICAO by the Kingdom of Morocco under the leadership of His Majesty, King Mohammed the Sixth.
3. The theme of today's gathering draws attention to Morocco's privileged geographical position and its potential as an engine of regional and intercontinental development. It is being supported and hosted by ICAO because so much of this potential derives directly from Morocco's air transport capabilities.
4. This is something ICAO is always eager to highlight on behalf of our States, and was suitably stressed by our recent adoption of the *Economic Development of Air Transport* as a new Strategic Objective.

5. The scope and purpose of this forum is also very much in line with the recent agreements signed between ICAO and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), which seek to place renewed focus on the symbiotic relationship of tourism and air transport and the significant economic contributions they make to local, regional and global GDP.
6. But of course economic benefits, whether from air transport, tourism, or both, do not simply appear out of thin air. Effective policies must be set in place, and a strong commitment must be made in terms of air transport regulation, airport and air navigation infrastructure development, safety oversight capabilities, and the many associated responsibilities which ICAO's Member States are all-too familiar with.
7. It is only by taking these steps, in line with ICAO's global provisions, that a State can truly optimize the full economic and social development potential of today's rapid and reliable international air transport network.
8. I'm sure this was precisely what motivated the Kingdom of Morocco back in 2006, for instance, when it signed the Euro-Mediterranean Aviation Agreement to open its skies.
9. This agreement permits EU and Moroccan airlines to operate any route they wish between a European and Moroccan airport. It also allows these airlines significant freedom in determining route frequency, capacity and the related passenger fares. Lastly and importantly, it contains clear safeguards on fair competition.

10. Having supported and encouraged greater liberalization of air transport services for many years now, it comes as no surprise to ICAO that Morocco's passenger capacity has tripled in the years since this agreement was established, from 200,000 to 600,000 seats.
11. Seventy new routes have also been developed during this period, allowing airlines, passengers and businesses to connect directly from Morocco to some 120 destinations in Europe, Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Middle East.
12. This enhanced connectivity is directly in line with ICAO's objectives, as exemplified by the UNWTO agreement I mentioned earlier, the support and one-stop capability we provide to air services negotiators at ICAO's Air Services Negotiations (ICAN) events each year, or the clear mandate we received from the 2013 Air Transport Conference to develop new international agreements to liberalize market access, air cargo services, and air carrier ownership and control.
13. Our last ICAN event, held in Durban this past December, also featured a seminar on fair competition which was extremely well-received. We will definitely consider a similar value-added session when ICAN convenes again this November in Bali, Indonesia.

14. Taken together, these many efforts and policy positions on behalf of ICAO provide a clear rationale for our support of Morocco's own determination today to liberalize its air transport sector even further and maximize its social and economic development potential.
15. This liberalization will be a catalyst for the development of air transport not only in the North African region, but more generally across Africa as well.
16. ICAO is grateful therefore to be able to serve as host for Morocco's Forum today, and I trust you will all take away with you some very worthwhile perspectives on the economic path we must jointly pursue.
17. It is only by maximizing connectivity in this manner, and continuing to put due emphasis on end-user needs, that we will continue to enjoy the full benefit of what a vibrant and liberalized air transport sector can deliver in terms of local, regional and continental prosperity.

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