**STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO),
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TO THE CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS
RESPONSIBLE FOR AIR TRANSPORT**

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It is an honour for me to address the second Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Air Transport. I had the pleasure of speaking before the first such ministerial Conference last year in Sun City at which you addressed the priority issues of safety, liberalization, and the participation of your airlines in the global marketplace.

I was most impressed with your commitment to reduce the accident rate for Africa to the worldwide level by 2008. It is vital that you achieve this goal. Tourism and trade with the rest of the world will not flourish as it should unless and until aviation is safe and, more important, acknowledged to be safe. Unfortunately, the accident rate in Africa remains on an upward trend and negates the tremendous efforts of many national authorities to improve the integrity of their civil aviation infrastructure. Also, when accidents do occur, search and rescue services often fail to provide assistance to survivors of air crashes or ditches.

The ICAO Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation held in March of this year opened the door to viable and effective solutions. The Final Declaration of the Conference reaffirmed that transparency and sharing of safety information are fundamental to a safe air transport system. It also emphasized that implementation and enforcement of all safety-related provisions of the Chicago Convention, its Annexes, ICAO Assembly Resolutions and Aviation Security Conventions are essential to ensure aviation safety. This, I would suggest, must be the starting point of any substantial and sustained improvement.

One concrete application of this principle is that States must ensure that operating certificates and pilot licenses for foreign aircraft entering their airspace are valid and conform to ICAO specifications. When this cannot be verified, States have the right to restrict admission, which some have done in the form of blacklisting. Regrettably, this implies that recognition can no longer be based solely on the principle of mutual trust. The situation may continue as long as States issue certificates and licenses that do not meet applicable standards.

At the insistence of African States, the Conference Declaration did stipulate that restrictions on aircraft should be used exclusively for safety considerations and not for gaining economic advantage. Accordingly, ICAO agreed to develop a harmonized process and a uniform approach for the surveillance of foreign aircraft operations. But this can only work if States commit to providing ICAO with reliable and up-to-date information concerning registry, ownership and control of all aircraft habitually involved in international civil aviation.

Greater safety can also be achieved through increased transparency in the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme. USOAP, as it is called, consists of regular, mandatory, systematic and harmonized safety audits carried out by ICAO in its 189 Contracting States. These audits assess the level of implementation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices, identify safety concerns or deficiencies, and provide recommendations for their resolution.

In a landmark decision, Directors General at the Safety Conference agreed to post results from USOAP on the ICAO public website. I believe this will encourage States to correct safety deficiencies that remain in their aviation systems. It can also enable other States and donors to provide more rapid and effective assistance to those that require much-needed financial or human resources.

The Conference also emphasized the need for Safety Management Systems (SMS) that transcend the prescriptive aspect of compliance with ICAO standards with a proactive, performance-based process and the implementation of a safety culture throughout the aviation infrastructure.

Overall, the Conference emphasized the need for all States to ensure the timely establishment of Civil Aviation Authorities that are adequately funded, competent, empowered and autonomous to the extent that they can act independently on safety issues. Without a proper regulatory framework and an effective oversight mechanism, meeting and maintaining your goal for 2008 and beyond may prove elusive. As always, ICAO stands ready to assist in achieving your objectives.

I invite you to be guided by the Declaration and the conclusions of the DGCA Conference. I believe you will find them extremely valuable in helping to raise the overall safety of your air transport systems and meet one of the basic conditions for competing effectively in international air transport markets.

Reliability of air transport services is just as critical to competing in the global marketplace and creating investment and export opportunities that drive economic activity and contribute to improved living standards. This is particularly relevant to the African continent where almost one third of countries are landlocked, with no access to the ocean or seas, and where air transport infrastructure can be developed more efficiently than road or rail.

However, the present State of civil aviation in Africa is generally characterized by a large number of airlines suffering from poor financial performances, low traffic volumes, high insurance costs and low productivity. There are serious concerns regarding air traffic navigation and management of Africa's airspace as well as the overall safety record in the African skies, including problems associated with aging or near-obsolete equipment on the ground and in the air. The difficulty in getting from one point in Africa to another means that often the best route between two points in Africa is via Europe. It is, moreover, increasingly difficult for African carriers to compete effectively in international air transport markets on the basis of bilateral arrangements and in the absence of a liberalized regime of traffic rights to facilitate the free movement of goods and persons.

As well, a growing number of donor governments and lending institutions are asking for a coordinated assistance effort in the air transport sector which will commit to a broad reform agenda and will allow policy makers and the donor community to work within a common strategic framework of identified priorities and goals.

What is needed is a strategic framework for change to ensure the coordinated and streamlined development of Africa's aviation industry. This would include an in-depth review of national and regional-level air transport policies, and the need for investments to be made in new technologies, safety and security improvements, quieter and more-fuel efficient aircraft, infrastructure modernisation and adaptation, and business simplification plans for carriers. Policy and strategy options to promote a common plan of action could be developed, while at the same time recognizing that Africa is a continent of diverse experiences and uneven development.

I see seven major areas where action could be taken.

- The successful implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision and definition of a common external air transport policy for Africa;
- The achievement of further progress on economic and airline marketing issues, including privatization of airlines and airports, the marginalization of African carriers in international airline mergers, and technological improvements to passengers services and procedures;, and radio frequency identification technology for baggage handling systems.
- Strengthening of the institutional framework to foster the healthy growth of air transport, promote greater multilateral cooperation and establish appropriate governmental infrastructures for safety and security oversight;
- Formulation of policies and infrastructure programmes that improve safety and facilitate growth, including investment in increased airport capacity and improvements, in addition to other initiatives I mentioned earlier;
- Development of appropriate systems and mechanisms to respond to security requirements;
- Reduction of emissions and noise pollution without adversely affecting air transport growth;
- Encouragement of sustainable development by using cost-recovery measures, taxes, and revenue-generating mechanisms to fund deteriorating infrastructure, equipment and services.

I am happy to say that many of these topics will be discussed at a development forum to be held jointly by ICAO, the World Bank and the Air Transport Action Group from 24 to 26 May, at ICAO Headquarters in Montreal. Under the theme of Maximizing Civil Aviation's Economic Contribution, the meeting will look into the challenges and potential of safe, secure and sustainable air transport in open skies, with a special focus on Africa and other developing markets.

Nevertheless, safety improvement in Africa is a *sine qua non* condition for the development of civil aviation in Africa and it is necessary to take the appropriate measures promptly. I read with interest the panel's proposals and I am convinced that they provide the base upon which a bold and effective plan of action can be built. In particular, I took note of those concerning the autonomy of civil aviation administrations and the implementation of the Declaration of the Conference of Directors General of Civil Aviation.

I am sure that during this second Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Air Transport you will take the necessary measures to reach the goal you set for yourselves: that of raising Africa's level of safety to the world average level. I can assure you that ICAO is ready to work together with you toward this goal, which, as I said at the beginning of my speech, is a vital one.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Chicago Convention calls for air transport to be established on the basis of equality of opportunity. Over the years, certain conditions were set for participation in the global marketplace. These may be aptly summarized by the expression I mentioned a few moments ago - safe, secure and sustainable air transport.

The world aviation community is ready to work closely with African States and organizations in making sure that civil aviation in the Region meets the standards and conditions for them to take a full and active part in the global marketplace. One good example is the implementation on 11 May of two air navigation routes linking South Africa and Europe, the result of exemplary cooperation between ICAO, States involved and ASECNA.

Everyone stands to benefit from having all African States play an active role in the global air transport system. This Conference can be instrumental in furthering that process.

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