



**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO),
DR. ASSAD KOTAITE,
AT THE OPENING OF THE 35TH SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY**

(Montreal 28 September 2004)

I have the honour to declare open this 35th Session of the Assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organization.

On behalf of the Council of ICAO, the Secretary General, Dr. Taïeb Chérif, and members of this Assembly, I extend a most warm welcome to our three distinguished guests: the Honourable Jean-C. Lapierre, Minister of Transport, representing the Government of Canada; the Honourable Monique Gagnon-Tremblay, Deputy Premier and Minister of International Relations, representing the Government of Quebec; and His Worship Gérald Tremblay, Mayor of the City of Montreal.

Welcome also to delegations of Contracting States and representatives of international organizations, as well as friends and colleagues from every part of the world, all dedicated to the development of a healthy global air transport system and I especially welcome into this family of nations Saint Kitts and Nevis which has joined this Organization since the last regular session of the Assembly in 2001. The number of participants at this 35th Session of the Assembly confirms the vital role played by your Organization in shaping the destiny of international civil aviation.

Those of you who were present at the opening of the 33rd Session of the Assembly in September of 2001 will recall that we met in an atmosphere of relative uncertainty. Terrorist attacks of the past few weeks have emphasized once again that they can strike anyone, anywhere, at anytime, without consideration for human life. Such horrendous acts could well destabilize society were it not for the collective resolve of States and individuals to stand together against this universal threat. As is the case in aviation, global cooperation is key to meeting successfully the global security challenge.

On 7 December of this year, we will mark the 60th anniversary of ICAO. For almost 60 years, through clear skies and heavy turbulence, your Organization has spared no effort to ensure the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation. ICAO has met head-on every technical, operational, economic, legal and political challenge with an unflinching determination to maintain civil aviation as the safest and most efficient mode of mass transportation ever created.

One measure of our collective success is the safety record achieved in 2003, when the number of accidents involving fatalities on the world's scheduled operations was the lowest since 1945. Even with the quantum leap in the number of flights and passengers over six decades, aviation safety in 2003 was safer than when ICAO was created. As for aviation security, there were no successful hijackings on international flights and no loss of life on the three domestic hijackings that did occur. This, however, must not lull us into a false sense of security. In the face of potential acts of unlawful interference against persons and facilities, and the ominous threat of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), we must remain forever vigilant and proactive. Still, I have no hesitation in stating that the global air transport system remains fundamentally sound.

By any account, the past triennium has been most challenging in maintaining the integrity of the system and laying the foundation for the future growth of air transport worldwide. It began with the immense pressures brought to bear by the horrific events of 11 September 2001 and their devastating impact

on the air transport industry, compounded by a slowdown in the global economy. Next came the build-up to armed conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the concerns raised by the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS).

We dealt with these unexpected circumstances in a decisive and timely manner. Concurrently, we made excellent progress in establishing blueprints for the future in all major components of international civil aviation: a plan for strengthening aviation security worldwide, including the establishment of a Universal Security Audit Programme; the expansion of the Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme; the streamlining and creation of air routes coupled with the development of a strategy for the establishment of a globally harmonized and seamless air navigation system; new standards to protect the environment; a strategy for the progressive liberalization of air transport worldwide; new legal instruments; and an operating budget to meet the pressing requirements of Contracting States and of the Organization.

I look forward to reviewing these many accomplishments during my presentation of the Annual Reports of the Council on Thursday morning. They constitute a bridge to the future of air travel, a period of time perhaps more challenging than the first 100 years of powered flight, which we celebrated on 17 December 2003. The second century of flight certainly will be more complex. Billions of passengers will be flying to more destinations worldwide, in growing numbers of much larger and technologically sophisticated aircraft, flying through ever crowded skies, often on flights of increasing duration. One hundred years from now, regular passenger flights in suborbital space and even outer space could be commonplace.

Whatever future we build together, one thing must not change. Safety and security always must be our top priority. I have often said that one aircraft accident is one too many and that one loss of life is one too many. There are some who suggest that we have reached a point in the development of air travel where we can strive for an operational context which is free of accidents involving fatalities. We may or may not agree, yet taking the steps to reach this ultimate operational goal can contribute to improving aviation safety still further in the years to come.

What are some of the steps that we can take? We will need to deal effectively with threats to the security of flights and facilities and remain focussed on accident prevention, especially controlled flight into terrain and runway incursions. We must maintain and adhere to stringent technical and operational criteria. While advances in technology and information systems can increase safety, they must reflect a human being's capacity for physical and mental adaptation. We must humanize air travel, for the passengers as well as for crews. Training must be widely available to ensure that the men and women who use the new technologies, from the cockpit to the control tower, attain and retain mastery of their tasks in this new man-machine interface. Weather forecasting will have to be even more accurate. Congestion must be addressed in a constrained airspace. There must be a common understanding among all operators and services providers that safety is everyone's concern. Safety must never take a back seat to economics in design, building and operation of systems and components.

Moreover, in a world tempted by unilateral action on a national or regional basis, we must not forget that aviation is by definition international and that it can only grow safely and securely through multilateral action. And ICAO is the only recognized multilateral body whose specific mission is to bring together the States of the world in establishing and maintaining a global, harmonized regulatory framework. It is a forum of exceptional value and effectiveness. It must be supported and strengthened, through active participation in its activities and implementation of its provisions.

We must work together towards safe and secure skies, safe and secure airports, protecting the environment, and supporting a sound, stable and revitalized industry. The theme of this year's

International Civil Aviation Day captures the essence of this synergistic relationship: “*International Cooperation: Solutions to Global Aviation Challenges*”.

For its part, ICAO will continue to develop and update standards, recommended practices and associated procedures, formulate air transport policies for the cohesive development of air transport worldwide, develop and revise international air law instruments, maintain a dynamic forum for reaching global consensus among all Contracting States, provide technical assistance to Contracting States when required, and nurture a productive relationship with all members of the global aviation community.

Contracting States must assume fully their responsibilities under the Chicago Convention, chief among them being the implementation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices and prompt notification of differences when full implementation is not practicable. This is the cornerstone of a safe and efficient global air transport system. Another requirement for us to progress in achieving our common objectives is for Contracting States to support their Organization. ICAO can respond to your needs only if it has the necessary resources to do so and only if Contracting States fulfill all of their obligations, including without delay the full payment of dues, on time each year.

The present Assembly is an opportunity for Contracting States to demonstrate their commitment to the ideals and wishes expressed some 60 years ago by the founders of ICAO. This is a pivotal time for aviation and a pivotal Assembly. The capacity of your Organization to maintain its programmes and activities rests with all of you. Your decisions over the next two weeks will determine the orientation of international civil aviation in the foreseeable future and the role of ICAO in making it happen.

Over the past 50 years, I have attended all of the Sessions of the Assembly. Since 1976, it has been my privilege to serve as President of the Council of the Organization. Throughout my career, I have visited most of the 188 ICAO Contracting States, some more than once. You have always received me warmly, listened to me attentively, and together we have solved a number of issues in a spirit of understanding, friendship, and cooperation. What I have achieved during half a century, we have achieved together.

In November, the Council of ICAO will elect its President. Should it decide to renew its confidence in me for another mandate, it again will be an honour for me to accept, however, I will suggest that my tenure be for a transitional period. If this is the case, it is unlikely that I will be with you for the next regular Session of the Assembly. I would therefore like to seize this opportunity to thank each and everyone of you most sincerely for these memorable years.

Civil aviation is a fundamental feature of today’s society. In all of modern history no other human accomplishment has contributed so much to the movement of individuals and goods throughout every part of the world. Over the years, it has grown into an integral part of the economy, a vital partner in world tourism and a catalyst for international cultural exchanges. That is what is at stake during this 35th Session of the Assembly of ICAO Contracting States. The responsibility is yours and so will be the satisfaction of having charted the course of civil aviation at a pivotal time in its exciting evolution.

This year, ICAO turns 60 and is as relevant as it was when it was created. In an age of seemingly insurmountable global challenges, it can be a beacon of hope for those who believe in the power of dialogue and cooperation. May that thought inspire us all as we undertake this meeting of nations.