



**ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION (ICAO),
MR. ROBERTO KOBEH GONZÁLEZ,
AT THE OPENING OF THE 36TH SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY**

(Montreal, 18 September 2007)

I have the honour to declare open the 36th 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 warm welcome to our three distinguished guests: The Honourable Lawrence Cannon, Minister of Transport, representing the Government of Canada; The Honourable Monique Gagnon-Tremblay, Minister of International Relations, representing the Government of Quebec; and His Worship Gérald Tremblay, Mayor of the City of Montreal.

I welcome also the delegations of Contracting States, particularly those from Montenegro and Timor-Leste who became Members of the Organization since the last regular session of the Assembly in 2004. I am pleased that a great number of representatives of international organizations and collaborators from the world over accepted our invitation to be with us for our deliberations aimed at enhancing the safety, security, sustainability and efficiency of the global air transport system. To all of you, I extend as well a most hearty welcome.

This opening ceremony provides me with an opportunity to recognize the work of my predecessor and good friend, Dr. Assad Kotaite, who was President of the Council for the first half of the present triennium. For the past 50 years, his efforts and devotion to civil aviation have contributed to making the world a more united place. On 7 December 2006, the Council bestowed upon him the lifetime honorary title of *President Emeritus of the Council of ICAO*. Dr. Kotaite is with us this morning and I invite you to join me in applauding him.

In his opening address to the Assembly in 2004, Dr. Kotaite provided a progressive and pragmatic assessment of the Organization's accomplishments for the triennium ending that year: a plan for strengthening aviation security worldwide; the expansion of the Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme; the streamlining and creation of air routes; new standards to protect the environment; progress towards the liberalization of air transport worldwide; new legal instruments; and a realistic operating budget to meet the pressing requirements of Contracting States and of the Organization.

Dr. Kotaite also put forth our challenges with clarity and vision, from the overall safety and sustainability of aviation to the humanization of globalization. He stressed that 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. 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 for international civil aviation. 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.

In my presentation of the Annual Reports of the past triennium on Thursday, it will be obvious that we have made excellent progress towards meeting those challenges. The reality is that much remains to be done. Even though civil aviation remains the safest mode of mass transportation, there are too many accidents in some regions of the world. The global air transport system, while very secure, is still vulnerable to terrorist attacks. In spite of enormous progress, the sustained increase in traffic means that it will be even more difficult to minimize the impact of aviation on the environment. And finally, growth in the number of flights is aggravating congestion in a number of places where facilities and systems already operate at full capacity.

Civil aviation, as an integral part of the global economy and a driving force for social development, must adapt to new realities. As decision-makers, all of us in this room must respond to new conditions and new opportunities wisely, while remaining true to the *raison d'être* of this Organization – the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation.

In our deliberations, let us be guided by the thought that what often seems overwhelming or impossible as we look ahead actually seems inevitable looking back. In past Assemblies, we have taken decisions that appeared daring or impossible to carry out and that today, in retrospect, find that it was the only course of action to take. Let us now place ourselves six years in the future, two Assemblies from now, and make decisions today that will stretch our thinking and our capabilities. In six years, we will probably find that those decisions had to be made and, more important, that they worked. Again, what often seems impossible looking ahead seems almost inevitable looking back.

That is what this 36th Assembly is all about – making things happen. If we act together, in a spirit of unrestrained cooperation, nothing is impossible.