



**Opening address by the Director of the Air Transport Bureau
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mrs. Folasade Odutola,
at the Third World Conference on Fear of Flying**

(Montreal, 4 to 6 June 2007)

Good morning ladies and gentlemen. I would like to welcome you most heartily to ICAO for this conference on the “Fear of Flying” which addresses the interests of the airline passenger. It is truly a pleasure and a distinct honour for me to address you on behalf of the International Civil Aviation Organization at what promises to be a most interesting conference. I am particularly encouraged by the presence among us of an exotic blend of professionals and academics as well as key representatives from a number of ICAO Contracting States. I am sure this eclectic level of participation will add vision to the discussions and lead to a rewarding outcome.

As the video pointed out a few minutes ago, the mission of ICAO is to ensure the safety, security and regularity of international civil aviation. I would emphasize that safety underpins a healthy and growing global air transport system that can contribute to the economic, social and cultural development of peoples and nations of the world.

What is truly significant about the theme of this Conference is not only its unique focus but also its reach, which goes beyond the very frontiers of aviation safety by delving into the psyche of the person to whom defying gravity at 30,000 feet above the ground is an overwhelming experience. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in

his inaugural address in 1933 said: “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself” This famous adage could well be the premise of your deliberations.

Throughout our history, we have, as an Organization, created and continually updated standards and recommended practices that have contributed to make aviation a remarkably safe and efficient mode of mass transportation. In 2006 for example, there were more than 25 million flights worldwide and only a handful of accidents. I certainly do not want to minimize the fact that accidents do occur. In fact, one accident is still one too many and one death is one too many. But the fact remains that air travel can be considered to be one of the safest forms of transportation and, given the extraordinary growth of the past half century, it has never been safer. This conclusion is arrived at through statistics. However, the statistics has little to do with the human mind. Fear of what might happen to one’s physical well-being is based on the uncomfortable awareness that life is fragile and we are all vulnerable, as none of us has any real control over it, whether in the air *or* on the ground. What is even more disturbing is that, in the air transport context, fear of flying is a specific phobia, not so much caused by a clear and present danger, but rather mostly caused by anxiety, as to what might happen even under the most normal circumstances. The response to this anxiety could be a totally uncontrolled and irrational act or behaviour that could jeopardize the safety of the aircraft and others on board.

ICAO’s current priorities lie in three main areas – ensuring safety, maximizing security and minimizing the adverse effects of aviation on the environment. Of these, safety and security have a direct bearing on the theme of this conference, since the injurious conduct of a passenger could well affect both the

safety and the security of the aircraft and those on board. In pursuance of ICAO's objective of enhancing civil aviation safety, ICAO is taking measures to identify and monitor existing types of safety risks to civil aviation while developing and implementing an effective and relevant global response to emerging risks. In order to achieve this, ICAO needs to ensure the timely implementation of its provisions by continuously monitoring the progress towards compliance by States.

Similarly, in the field of security, ICAO endeavours to identify and monitor existing types of security threats to civil aviation and develop and implement an effective global and relevant response to emerging threats. As in its pursuit of safety, ICAO continuously monitors the progress towards compliance with its provisions by States.

ICAO, as the global forum for civil aviation, is proud of its role as a promoter of global air transport policies that ensure a safe, secure and efficient and environment-friendly international civil aviation system. It is the central institution for global governance in civil aviation and therefore is keenly interested in following the progress of any forum such as this conference, that aims at assisting a key stakeholder – the airline passenger, while ensuring the integrity of the air transport product.

As earlier mentioned, one of the potential threats to the safety of a flight is the behaviour of a disruptive and unruly passenger. In mild instances, this may cause nothing more than annoyance to passengers and cabin crew. In severe cases, however, it may put the safety of a flight and its passengers and crew in a life-

threatening situation. It may even cause an airplane to crash, even though the possibility may seem quite remote.

An unruly passenger may also cause a flight to make an unscheduled landing at an airport other than its intended destination. This has important financial and operational consequences for an airline and certainly numerous inconveniences for passengers in terms delays, missed connections for business or holidays, cancelled meetings and other unpleasant circumstances.

ICAO has studied this problem for many years now through its Committee on Unlawful Interference. We have amassed considerable knowledge and expertise on the subject, with the valuable assistance of the air transport industry, law enforcement agencies and other concerned stakeholders. This has allowed us to develop guidelines for dealing with difficult passengers, including legal conventions on establishing the responsibility of States in cases of occurrences in flight. It is therefore most appropriate for ICAO to agree to join forces with the Valk Foundation and DePlour, to host this conference.

I see the objective of this forum over the next two days as achieving full understanding of this fascinatingly esoteric but troubling subject, towards identifying the specific needs and challenges of all parties involved so as to reach a consensus on a way forward progress in ensuring the continued safety and security of air transport.

This could well be a demanding task, but nonetheless one which could be accomplished through tenacity and conviction. We are looking forward to your

deliberations and are always anxious to learn, so that we may update our own standards and guidance materials. ICAO will continue to play a leading role within the world aviation community to reduce, and possibly one day eliminate, this common concern of ours. The first step towards addressing a challenge is to face it, and I believe we are doing exactly that by organizing this conference.

This is my first official public function as the new Director of the Air Transport Bureau of ICAO and I am delighted that it deals with a subject of concern for the human dimension, the wellbeing of all those who fly, be they passengers or crew.

Before I conclude my remarks, I want to acknowledge the excellent work of the organizing committee, the wonderful spirit of cooperation that is essential to success in any endeavour which it has displayed, and the contagious enthusiasm with which the team brought us on board so that we might lay the ground work for bringing the subject of Fear of Flying to an entirely new level.

In commending the organizers of this conference for taking the lead in this initiative, I am reminded of the proverb “you will never arrive as number one, if you only walk in the footsteps of others”. I wish you every success in your deliberations.

— END —