



**Address by
the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
to the World Leaders Summit on Children's Rights**

(3 February 2025, Vatican City, Holy See)

*Holy Father,
Your Majesty,
Excellencies,
Ministers,
Distinguished World Leaders,
Distinguished Guests,*

I am deeply honored to address this World Leaders Summit on Children's Rights, particularly regarding child labor and exploitation. My sincere gratitude goes to the Holy See for the opportunity to speak about this important issue of child trafficking.

Human trafficking represents one of the most severe violations of human rights, affecting millions worldwide. It involves coercion and deception to transport human beings for profit, with women and children in particular being targeted by criminals for all kinds of horrendous exploitation.

We all know that the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8 has specific target number 8.7 which urges action by all countries in a global partnership to take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.

Additionally, the Sustainable Development Goal 16.2 urges States to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children which draw specific attention to end human trafficking.

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), which is the Specialized Agency of the United Nations for international civil aviation, is fully committed to combating these heinous crimes, actively contributing to the UN Global Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Persons.

There are no specific statistics regarding human trafficking in aviation, but I deeply regret to confirm that aviation, as the most efficient means of global transport, has been subverted by traffickers at a shocking scale. This is unacceptable. Consequently, every State and air operator must be prepared and take all necessary measures to prevent trafficking through their air services.

ICAO's role is to guide and help governments and aviation industry (airlines, airports, security companies, handlers) to have all the tools they need.

The Organization's Assembly, a triennial gathering of all member States, has adopted resolutions on human trafficking and ICAO's Council has set technical Standards and Recommended Practices for global and uniform implementation by its 193 Member States.

On the basis of these Assembly Resolutions and Standards and Recommended Practices, ICAO has adopted a "Comprehensive Strategy for Combating Human Trafficking in the Aviation Sector".

The Comprehensive Strategy follows a victim-centered approach with clear reporting systems and designated points of contact for aviation operators, focusing in particular, in robust training and clear reporting protocols while encouraging collaboration for effective information-sharing systems to combat human trafficking.

In particular, I wish to highlight the importance of appropriate training for personnel that will be in contact with passengers.

In fact, the key barrier to human trafficking in aviation is the frontline aviation personnel. They must receive specialized training to identify and respond to trafficking. Airport staff, security staff, cabin crew, and pilots must receive training aiming at recognizing and reporting suspected instances of human trafficking.

In order to strengthen the impact of these efforts, we are working through strategic partnerships with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, the International Air Transport Association (IATA), and Airports Council International (ACI). This ensures that our development of essential training tools is both enhanced with specialist knowledge which is matched by the effective implementation of these anti-trafficking measures into daily aviation operations.

Additionally, our engagement with the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group against Trafficking in Persons strengthens our global and multilayered response.

Finally, we will build on that momentum at this April's ICAO Facilitation Conference. Hosted by the government of Qatar, it will feature a dedicated session on combating human trafficking in aviation. This will advance our collaborative approach and highlight the upcoming UN World Day Against Trafficking in Persons on 30 July 2025 – marking nearly a decade of global awareness efforts.

In closing, let me stress that we know that human trafficking cannot be tackled alone. Success requires a unified approach – bringing together governments, airlines, airports, civil society, and international organizations. Together, we must strengthen legislation and enforcement mechanisms, foster public-private partnerships to build resilient systems, and provide victim-centered support by prioritizing their dignity and recovery.

Our objectives and way forward are clear, thanks to strong commitments from all stakeholders. ICAO and its partners remain dedicated to delivering sustainable solutions that prioritize children's well-being. The continued support of Member States remains crucial to accelerating our progress toward eradicating child trafficking.

While ICAO stands firmly committed to ensuring a safe, secure and sustainable development of civil aviation, I wish to reaffirm our commitment to protecting the rights and dignity of every child so that our skies remain safe and fair for all.

Thank you.