



ICAO

**Remarks by the  
Secretary General of the  
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)  
Dr. Fang Liu,  
to the High Level/ Ministerial Meeting on Enhancing  
Air Transport Connectivity and Growth in West Africa**

*(Virtual Meeting, 18 March 2021)*

1. I would like to begin by welcoming the results of the expert's meeting with great enthusiasm.
2. We must recognize the long-term importance of air connectivity in Africa and West Africa in particular, whether to immediate priorities for sectoral and economic recovery from COVID-19, or to the future and sustainable prosperity of Africa.
3. Since I first took office as ICAO Secretary General, it has been a key objective of the Organization to help countries appreciate the significance of air transport's socio-economic benefits.
4. We have also directed our resources toward helping States become more effectively ICAO compliant, so that the international air routes and connections which foster personal prosperity and national economic growth could be realized more safely, securely and pervasively.
5. The ICAO Secretariat worked very hard to develop the materials and resources supporting this work, and to organize global events to foster the partnerships and resource allocation which helped to make it such a success.
6. The implementation support has been invaluable in preparing African States to be able to respond more effectively to the pandemic and its serious impacts, though of course nothing could have truly prepared international aviation for what it has had to endure and adapt to, this past year.

7. I would therefore like to appreciate here the tremendous efforts and achievements of Africa's Civil Aviation Authorities in terms of their pandemic response and recovery efforts to-date, and for the effective coordination they have achieved through ICAO's Regional Offices.
8. I also wish to welcome the emphasis in this report on the systemic obstacles which still remain with respect to our shared objectives for African regional and international connectivity.
9. This includes the political, institutional, financial, technological, infrastructural, social and human resource challenges. Indeed, we still have a long way to go to ensure in reality that "no country is left behind".
10. Many of these challenges can and are being addressed by synergies and outcomes being coordinated through and driven by ICAO, but with respect to the full liberalization of air transport in Africa we must continue to call together for greater political will and highest-level engagement, if we are to effectively address the remaining barriers to Africa's more open skies.
11. The expert report's strong focus on continued close coordination among African States, in addition to improved intersectoral collaboration among public health, tourism and trade, finance, and other partners, is also very directly aligned with ICAO's current priorities at the global level.
12. Its call for concrete risk-based national and regional strategic civil aviation plans furthermore recalls the comprehensive roadmaps for pandemic response and recovery which ICAO has developed at the global level, in addition to our much longer-standing Global Plans for Safety, Security, and Air Navigation Capacity and Efficiency.
13. All of these resources should be taken full advantage of by African States to inform and align the related targets and initiatives being set out.
14. Also to be leveraged are the AFI and AFI SECFAL Plans for safety and security, programmes which continue to be highly relevant to West African aviation. Even among the extreme challenges faced during 2020, overall Effective Implementation (EI) averages for both aviation Safety and Security and Facilitation for Africa States saw further improvement last year.

15. At the outset of the pandemic, ICAO quickly established a series of groups and platforms to facilitate rapid coordination and the international transfer of information and technical assistance.
16. These helped States and industry globally to cooperate more effectively and refine and align their responses, and supported closer international adherence to the COVID-19 guidelines issued by the Aviation Recovery Task Force of the ICAO Council.
17. The new rules, requirements, and recommendations required for pandemic response were by no means simple, whether for those of us in ICAO considering how and why to alleviate various standards to help countries adapt, or for the countries themselves as they confronted such unprecedented circumstances.
18. However in light of additional information sharing and monitoring resources consolidated on ICAO's COVID-19 Response and Recovery Implementation Centre (CRRIC), as well as the tailored guidance material, training, tools, and expert support we provided for States in a series of COVID-19 implementation packages and webinars, today over 95 per cent of ICAO Members States are now working together more efficiently and effectively to respond to COVID-19, and the real time information and updates they're sharing on ICAO's platforms are greatly aiding our analysis and forecasting efforts.
19. A last point I wish to underscore from the expert report is its highlighting of how innovation will be so critical to every air transport stakeholder going forward, whether in government or industry.
20. ICAO recognizes this very clearly today, and the Secretariat and Council are making the acceleration of effective civil aviation standardization and regulation a highest priority moving forward.
21. New partnerships and groups have already been formalized to aid this process, and everyone is committed to ensuring that our own innovations in terms of standardization, regulation, and certification support a more responsive, safe, secure, and sustainable aviation sector moving forward.
22. In concluding these remarks, I wished to take a moment to express how tremendously grateful I've been for the steadfast support of African States throughout my past six years as ICAO Secretary General.

23. I would also take a moment to recognize and appreciate here the many important contributions of Dr. Aliu to African aviation, and most especially his launching of the *No Country Left Behind* initiative during his tenure as Council President.
24. I lastly wish to acknowledge Direct-General Nuhu's many contributions as well, and notably as the Representative to the ICAO Council for Nigeria, and as Coordinator of the ICAO AFI Group.
25. Your countries have shown exceptional resilience to the pandemic situation, and with increased liberalization and innovation ICAO expects to see the incredible air transport growth potential in Africa optimized still further – for the benefit of your many societies and citizens, and for the unity and prosperity of this remarkable and beautiful continent.
26. Thank you.