



Address by the Secretary General of ICAO
Mr. Raymond Benjamin
to the
AFI Regional Aviation Safety Group (AFI-RASG)
(Kampala, 26-30 March 2012)

Honourable Ministers
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour for me to join you for the opening ceremony of the first Meeting of the African and Indian Ocean Regional Aviation Safety Group and I wish to take this opportunity to thank the Government of Uganda for having accepted to host the event. All the support and excellent facilities provided in this regard are highly appreciated.

I am particularly pleased to see so many key representatives from States as well as international and regional organizations present — this is a clear demonstration of the importance given to aviation safety in the region and to the need for all partners to work closely together to build a global strategy for Africa.

Aviation is a powerful impetus for economic development. A healthy and growing air transport system gives access to the global marketplace. It creates well-paying jobs at home and supports the world's largest industry, travel and tourism. Overall, civil aviation contributes about 8 per cent of the global GDP and encourages social and cultural development everywhere. In other words, to promote the growth of air transport is to promote progress. But one must be diligent in facing up to the enormous challenges posed by growth, especially rapid growth.

Safety is our shared *raison d'être* and aviation accidents in Africa are a reminder that many States still need to strengthen their safety oversight capabilities. Even with the improvements we have seen in the region, as far as I am concerned, one accident is always one too many, and the loss of even one life, is one too many. The world has entrusted us with a noble mission, to protect the lives and well-being of the travelling public. We have, and must, continue to do everything within our power to make sure that air travellers get to their destination safely and unharmed.

Regions have been addressing flight safety issues through different mechanisms established by States and industry partners. And while progress has been achieved through sub-regional initiatives such as PIRGs (Planning and Implementation Regional Groups), COSCAPs (Cooperative Development of Operational Safety and Continuing Airworthiness Programmes) and Regional Safety Oversight Organizations (RSOOs), there is definitely a need to complement these initiatives on a region-wide basis.

With this in mind, ICAO's Air Navigation Commission proposed to create a new framework for monitoring progress, coordinating actions among States and making recommendations to ICAO that would facilitate the implementation of the Global Aviation Safety Plan and the associated Global Aviation Safety Roadmap.

At its 190th Session held on 25 May 2010, the ICAO Council approved the establishment of Regional Aviation Safety Groups worldwide and mandated the Secretariat to nurture their development and guide their activities. Consequently, Regional Aviation Safety Groups have been or are being established for the North American, Caribbean and South American regions, and the European, Middle East and Asia/Pacific regions.

It is now Africa's turn. This first meeting of the African and Indian Ocean Regional Aviation Safety Group is a milestone event for the continent. Not only will the establishment of this group increase awareness of safety issues in the region, but it will also provide the mechanism for addressing them, as is the case with AFI Planning and Implementation Regional Group in relation to air navigation. The Group will serve as a regional cooperative forum for Africa, integrating global, sub-regional, national and industry efforts in pursuing the enhancement of aviation safety.

It is no coincidence, but out of deliberate consideration, that we are holding this week, here in Kampala, a Regional Aviation Safety Group meeting and a PIRG meeting. Several decades ago, ICAO established PIRGs to deal primarily with air navigation plans at a regional and global level, but PIRGs necessarily touch on safety issues, which makes proper coordination between PIRGs and Regional Aviation Safety Groups critical to avoid duplication of efforts and develop a systematic approach towards safety.

A real strength of the Regional Aviation Safety Groups is that they use a data-driven approach to identify risk areas and then implement tailor-made action plans. The AFI region currently has many safety initiatives that need focus and coordination to avoid duplication. We have made some progress towards meeting the challenges faced by Africa in creating a safe air transport system. However, the region has much more work to do, particularly when considering the present rate of aircraft accidents on the continent and also the sustained increase in traffic and the challenges this brings, including aviation's environmental impact.

As I mentioned earlier, aviation accidents are timely reminders that deficiencies identified under ICAO's Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme since 1999 are still present. While safety oversight auditing can prove effective in identifying and promoting corrective action, it is not an end in and of itself. Safety enhancements will only occur through action and continuous review of the effectiveness of the actions taken. A major focus for the AFI region must be to rectify deficiencies found during our safety oversight audits.

Public reaction has reinforced this message. Through the media, the public has expressed its need for answers to troubling questions concerning aviation safety and conveyed serious concern about the lack of response from some authorities.

Enhancing safety oversight capabilities is particularly significant for States that lack the necessary human, technical or financial resources. However, individual States need not do it alone. The genesis of international civil aviation relied on international cooperation and to enhance safety in the region, we will need to build on this cooperation. CAAs can support one another through the implementation of sustainable regional safety oversight organizations and regional accident and incident investigation agencies.

Globally, national civil aviation authorities, industry and funding institutions will need to cooperate fully in the provision of aviation technical assistance and guidance. ICAO stands ready to help in coordinating multilateral assistance when that is the preferred approach, so that States may build the required capacity and implement safe practices throughout their air transport systems.

As you are about to embark on building a global strategy for Africa, I would like to leave you with this simple message:

You are the custodians of a powerful instrument of economic, social and cultural development for the citizens of your respective countries.

You hold in your hands the tools that keep air transport safe and efficient for all those who fly on your airlines, who walk through your airports and who travel through your airspace.

Together, you form a global network.

Together, you can save lives and give meaning to the vision of the Chicago Convention for a world aviation system that promotes peace and understanding among peoples and nations of the world.

Together, you can create a regional strategy for aviation safety that will be your legacy to the world for decades to come.

I very much look forward to building this global strategy with you over the next few days.

Thank you for your attention.

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