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ASSEMBLY — 36TH SESSION

PLENARY

Agenda Item 2: Statements by delegations of Contracting States and of Observers

STATEMENT PRESENTED BY KIRIBATI

Mr President,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

I bring warm greetings from my country Kiribati, in the Central Pacific Ocean. For those of you who are not very familiar with our where-about, Kiribati is located in the central tropical Pacific Ocean where the International dateline crosses over the Equator.

Mr. President, before I go any further, please allow me first of all to also join other previous speakers in congratulating you on your appointment. My delegation and I shall look forward to a very successful Assembly at this time under your capable guidance, leadership and stewardship. May I also take this opportunity on behalf of the Kiribati delegation to extend also our sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Government and the people of Canada for their warm welcome and hospitality in hosting this Assembly in their beautiful country. Last but not least, please allow me also to extend our deepest congratulations to ICAO and all Staff for their excellent efforts in ensuring efficient and smooth organization of this ICAO 36th Assembly.

Mr President, as this Assembly may be aware, Kiribati is probably one of the remotest air route destinations within the ICAO membership (Contracting States) community. But remote as it may be, Kiribati attaches great importance to its membership of ICAO and to this end, we are indeed grateful and privileged that we are able at this time to attend this important gathering that normally occurs only in every 3 years.

Mr President, at the last Assembly in 2004, Kiribati requested this august body for a review of FIR arrangements presently governing Kiribati airspace. The request was basically to enable Kiribati, as a full sovereign state, to have full control and management over its own airspace in accordance with Article 1 of the Chicago Convention. It is indeed with great regret to note that little progress, if any at all, has been achieved in this respect. Today, we are here once again to humbly request this Assembly for that review. It is our sincere hope that our request this time would be able to be taken on board and to be taken up more seriously.

As would be noted, the Kiribati Government has already submitted a proposal to the ICAO Regional Office seeking the establishment and proper delineation of a Kiribati FIR to enable Kiribati to be held accountable to ICAO for the provision of safe services to airlines travelling through that airspace. Currently, one third of Kiribati airspace is under the control and management of the Nadi (Fiji) FIR while the other two thirds is under the control and management of the Oakland (USA) FIR. By virtue of such arrangements, Kiribati sovereign airspace is, therefore, being allocated to and divided up between the managers of the Nadi and Oakland FIRs and effectively regarded as Fiji's and USA's airspaces respectively.

Present arrangements have been inherited from the colonial era when Kiribati was under colonial rule. As such these arrangements are therefore out of date and naturally would only be fair to Kiribati that they are now reviewed and updated to give back full sovereign rights to Kiribati to manage its own airspace. Present arrangements are not only depriving Kiribati of its sovereign rights assured under the Chicago Convention but are also depriving the people of Kiribati from fully enjoying the economic benefits that they should rightly be enjoying from the ownership of their own airspace.

Under existing arrangements, at least 10 major Airline routes are running through and flying across Kiribati sovereign airspace without any formal Air Service Agreement (ASA) or In-transit Agreement ever signed with the Kiribati Government. This is obviously a direct violation of Article 1 of the Chicago Convention and furthermore is also inconsistent with the spirit of Assembly resolution A35-14 on consolidated statements of ICAO policies and practices relating to Regional Air Navigation Plans and Delimitation of Air Traffic Services (ATS) airspaces. In this connection Kiribati would, therefore, like to request that this duly unfair anomaly is properly corrected to avoid Kiribati being continually marginalized in future developments within the Aviation industry.

Kiribati is but a small and poor nation with very limited natural resources to support the sustainability of its economy. The financial pressures placed upon its national budget to meet the requirements of the aviation industry are particularly very demanding. This includes for instance, Kiribati obligations in facilitating Cassidy Airport on Christmas Island as an ETOPS Alternate airport for airlines in the Pacific region flying scheduled flights to and from Honolulu. The benefits from the establishment and proper delineation of the Kiribati FIR would go a long way in assisting to finance improvements to infrastructure and services in these respects.

Kiribati may not yet have the technical capacity at the present time to manage its own FIR and may still need to rely on other FIR managers around the region for assistance in that respect. However, what is important is that its sovereign right to fully own and control its own airspace and thus proper delineation of its FIR, is accorded due recognition by ICAO and the International community.

Mr President, on environmental issues, Kiribati welcomes ICAO initiatives and efforts in trying to address the global issue of environmental concern specifically targeting "to limit or reduce the impact of aviation greenhouse gas emissions on climate change."

In particular, Sea level rise as a direct consequence of global warming and climate change from greenhouse gas emissions is a very serious concern to Kiribati. Kiribati being a country of small low lying atoll islands rising a mere 3 meters above sea level, the prospects of such sea level rise presents a real threat to its very existence as a nation and as a people. Scientists has predicted that with current trends in greenhouse gas emissions, if left undeterred, Kiribati and other similar very vulnerable low lying atoll island nations in the Pacific will face the fate of being under water within as early as the next 50 years from now. Whilst Kiribati does not totally disagree with the view that a combination of technology and

operational improvements may probably be one of the best options available to manage such impacts, Kiribati believes that the issue of timing is of essence the most critical that should also be considered. Extremely vulnerable countries such as Kiribati do not have the luxury of time to be able to afford to wait too long for any real action from those concerned. In this connection, Kiribati feels strongly that immediate implementation of action plans with tangible results in the shortest time possible should also be a focus of emphasis on these issues.

That being said, Kiribati is committed to fully supporting the overall work of ICAO. In particular, Kiribati would like to commend ICAO in its continuing efforts at improving overall security and safety standards within the Aviation Industry, notably through its assistance to the Pacific Aviation Safety Office (PASO) and through its USOAP and ASAP programs. In this regard, Kiribati supports the relevance and work of ICAO Regional Offices and in particular, the need to adequately resource them with the view to strengthening their capacity to enable them reach out more in extending their services and assistance to member states.

Mr President, I thank you for this opportunity to share some of our views on certain issues of concern to Kiribati at this Assembly and we shall look forward to a very successful ICAO 36th Assembly at this time.

Thank you.

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