

ICAO Facilitation Conference 2025

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Your Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, esteemed colleagues, ladies, and gentlemen.

Assalaam Alaikum. A very good morning to you all.

It is with profound respect and a deep sense of responsibility that I stand before you today at this pivotal ICAO Facilitation Conference, where we gather to strengthen global aviation through collaboration, innovation, and shared commitment. As the Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation of the Maldives, I bring to this forum not only the unique challenges of a small island developing state but also an unwavering commitment to seamless and secure air travel.

The Maldives, a chain of small islands spread across the vastness of the Indian Ocean, relies on aviation as its major artery that connects it to the world. Aviation plays a crucial role in the success and sustainability of tourism in the Maldives, given the country's unique geography and global positioning. Our economic vitality, cultural exchange, and our very survival depend on the efficiency and security of our aviation system. This reality underscores the critical importance of capacity building and implementation support, the very essence of our discussions today.

Implementing ICAO standards presents acute challenges for small island states like ours, operating with logistical and resource limitations. To bridge the technical and resource gaps and address the challenges of evolving regulatory demands, robust and context-specific technical support from ICAO is paramount. For the Maldives, this means enhanced digital proficiency, specialized training in trending technologies, and strengthened cybersecurity. Digitalizing border control, training in API and biometric technologies, and strong cybersecurity frameworks to safeguard our aviation systems from the evolving landscape of digital threats are fundamental necessities for my country.

Auditing and oversight mechanisms are the backbone of effective aviation systems. The ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) and Universal Security Audit Programme (USAP) have been instrumental in identifying gaps and fostering continuous improvement. But audits alone are not enough. Implementation support must follow. Maldives advocates for a collaborative approach where audits are seen as opportunities for mutual learning and continuous improvement rather than just compliance checks. States require actionable roadmaps, mentorship programs, and post-audit guidance to translate audit findings into tangible

progress. ICAO's oversight should prioritize constructive dialogue and empower states towards sustainable compliance.

Sustainable aviation development hinges on sustainable capacity development. Access to comprehensive trainings and certification, to equip our aviation personal with necessary skills and knowledge and regional collaboration and knowledge exchange platforms to share best practices, lessons learned and innovative solutions, supporting the development of sustainable training infrastructure to ensure a continuous pipeline of skilled aviation professionals would empower states to build resilient aviation systems that can adopt to evolving challenges.

Speaking of capacity building, it is important to highlight that the current government of the Maldives has comprehensive plans to elevate the aviation sector. The Maldives Integrated Airport Development Masterplan, a 10-year initiative, is a thorough framework to enhance the entire aviation infrastructure to accommodate anticipated growth in demand for air transport. From upgrading existing airports and enhancing operational efficiency, to establishing new airports, to ensure that each inhabited island is within a 30-minute travel time, this masterplan aims to develop and maintain a resilient aviation system that fosters sustainable aviation growth, enhances connectivity, and positions the Maldives at the forefront of global tourism and trade. I sincerely thank HEP Dr. Mohamed Muizz for this initiative.

The ongoing development of the Velana International Airport (VIA), as a key component of our national capacity-building strategy, holds equal significance. It represents a substantial investment in modernizing our aviation infrastructure and enhancing our ability to manage increased passenger traffic. This development includes the establishment of a state-of-the-art international terminal designed to provide world-class services to 7.5 million passengers annually, utilizing the latest aviation technologies.

Modernizing and restructuring the Maldives Civil Aviation Authority (MCAA) is a significant initiative that is fundamental to building a globally competitive aviation network. This is a comprehensive effort to enhance MCAA's capacity to effectively regulate, oversee, and foster the sustainable growth of the Maldives' aviation sector.

These developments underscore the critical need for increased training, international cooperation, and funding to develop aviation infrastructure. While ICAO has made progress in providing tailored technical support, these efforts must be intensified to ensure no state is left behind due to capacity limitations.

The Maldives stands ready to contribute to this collective endeavour, fostering collaboration, transparency, and mutual support. We urge ICAO to continue championing the **"No Country Left**

Behind" initiative, empowering all nations, regardless of size or circumstance, to fully participate in the global aviation community.

Excellencies, the strength of our global aviation system relies on solidarity. Let us mobilize resources to scale up technical assistance, strengthen partnerships, and embrace innovation to efficiently address capacity gaps. Remember, the progress of one state benefits the entire aviation community. Together, we can ensure every nation has the tools to excel in facilitation, safety, and sustainability.

Before I conclude, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Ministry of Transport and the Civil Aviation Authority of Qatar for their exceptional hospitality. My heartfelt appreciation also extends to ICAO for providing this platform for collaboration and exchange. I would also like to thank each and every one present here today for generously sharing your expertise. Thank you very much to you all. I wish you a pleasant remainder of the day. Thank you.

Wassalaam Alaikum