

Statement of the Head of the Delegation at the opening ceremony of the Ministerial Segment

17 April 2025

Mr. Minister of Transport of Qatar, and attending Ministers,

Mr. President and Members of the ICAO Council,

Mr. Secretary General of ICAO and Civil Aviation Authorities,

Delegates,

On behalf of the Spanish delegation, the Directorate General of Civil Aviation and the Ministry of Transport and Sustainable Mobility of Spain, it is a pleasure to address you at this high-level segment of the ICAO Facilitation Conference.

Over the course of these three days we have been able to listen to experts and discuss in the various working sessions encompassed in the concept of “Air Transport Facilitation”.

All these topics are barely visible in the day-to-day operation of the aviation system, until a disruption such as the one experienced during the pandemic occurs, or until there is some serious incident.

It is then that the importance of the proper functioning of the whole chain of actors, which often depend on authorities that are not directly related to civil aviation or the States’ transport departments, really becomes apparent. Therefore, proper coordination and cooperation among all of them is absolutely essential.

This is the reason why Spain has the National Air Transport Facilitation Committee and the National Facilitation Program, both of them instruments that allow us to work in coordination and to follow up on the provisions of ICAO Annex 9 and other national provisions so that all actors are able to work effectively together.

With Spain being the 2nd most visited tourist destination worldwide, aviation is essential for us, as it is a driving force for our economy, and it fosters economic and social development unlike any other sector.

We proudly, but also responsibly, recognize the fact that Spain is the 1st country in Europe and 5th in the world in terms of number of passengers in our airports, thanks to the exceptional infrastructures and the excellent professionals we have in the sector.

Air traffic growth forecasts for the coming years are very positive: the new long-term ICAO Strategic Plan foresees that by 2050 we will reach 12.4 billion passengers, which is would almost triple the current levels.

This highly positive forecast raises enormous challenges, not only in terms of safety and infrastructure capacity, but also in terms of the quality of services passengers should receive, from the beginning of their journey to the end. This means that we must focus on improving the passengers' experience, and here Annex 9 on Facilitation will play a key role, as well as other provisions and, in particular, close cooperation among all actors: authorities, regulators, airports, airlines, handling operators, etc. who will allow to improve the passenger experience despite the huge growth foreseen in traffic.

Since Spain is one of the States located in the south of Europe, we are very aware, every day, of the human tragedy of migration and, in particular, the impacts of irregular migration through air transport. We continue to work and collaborate with States and international organizations to identify such cases and prosecute criminal organizations and human trafficking networks that profit from these people's needs.

I could never overlook in this speech the importance of addressing the human consequences of the instances when the civil aviation safety system fails us and tragic accidents occur. We have had the opportunity to listen first-hand to the needs faced by victims of such events, represented by the Chairwoman of the Air Crash Victims' Families' Federation International, Ms. Pilar Vera.

Unfortunately, there is still much to be done on this significant issue; and I take this opportunity to once again reaffirm Spain's commitment to continue promoting assistance to aircraft accident victims and their families in all forums, especially in ICAO.

In light of all that I have mentioned, Spain would like to show its commitment and strong support for the draft Ministerial Declaration expected to be adopted today.

This Declaration represents a key milestone for discussions at this fall's Assembly, and I believe that it will be a useful tool to guide the policies of ICAO and the States throughout the next three years.

Its adoption at this Conference will be the culmination of these 3 days of valuable discussions, undoubtedly facilitated by the magnificent organization of the State of Qatar and, particularly, by its Civil Aviation Authority. I would like to congratulate you, and also convey the Spanish delegation's sincere appreciation for the great hospitality we have received.

Finally, allow me to mention the new strategic goal that the Council has adopted within the framework of the ICAO Strategic Plan 2026-2050, "no country left behind".

Spain will continue to collaborate with all training, technical cooperation and knowledge-sharing initiatives that are promoted in the field of facilitation as well as in other areas. There are no borders in civil aviation, and the whole system can only be improved if we are all capable of doing it together, within the framework of multilateral institutions such as ICAO.

Thank you very much.