

Message from the Secretary-General of the International Transport Forum (ITF)

By Young Tae Kim (IFT)

Aviation has long played a vital role in connecting people, communities and economies across the globe. It is one of the defining enablers of global mobility. But like all sectors, it must now rise to the challenge of operating sustainably in a changing climate. The imperative is to ensure connectivity can continue without placing undue strain on the environment. Achieving this goal will require both innovation and policy action, underpinned by sustained international cooperation.

As the only intergovernmental organisation covering all modes of transport, the International Transport Forum (ITF) works to support countries in this transition. By generating evidence, convening partners and identifying practical solutions, the ITF aims to help governments and industry navigate the complex path towards sustainable transport systems — aviation included.

The ITF's partnership with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) reflects this commitment. Since 2015, the two organisations have worked together through a formal Memorandum of Co-operation, focusing on key areas such as liberalisation, infrastructure, safety and environmental sustainability. This agreement, which was renewed in 2019 and again in 2024, has deepened the collaboration between our technical and policy communities.

A prominent example is ITF's contribution to international policy discussions on sustainable aviation fuels (SAF). In 2023, the ITF released Sustainable Aviation Fuels: A Global Policy Perspective, a report that takes stock of national SAF strategies and offers guidance on how to accelerate

deployment. The report draws directly from discussions held at the 41st ICAO Assembly, which helped shape its structure and recommendations.

The report identifies four areas for policy action. First, it emphasises the importance of credible long-term signals to guide investment. Without stable demand expectations, market actors are unlikely to invest at the scale required. Second, the report calls for clearer and more harmonised sustainability frameworks. Differing criteria across jurisdictions risk undermining confidence, distorting markets, and fragmenting supply chains. Third, the report recommends well-designed support mechanisms to reduce risk for early investors and technology developers. These may include contracts-for-difference, blending mandates, or price floors, adapted to national circumstances. Finally, the report highlights the importance of international coordination. Because aviation is a global sector, fragmented approaches to SAF deployment can limit effectiveness and create inefficiencies. Aligning technical standards, sustainability benchmarks and reporting systems across borders will be critical to accelerating the global scale-up of SAF production and use.

The ITF also engages directly in global climate policy processes. As co-focal point for transport under the UNFCCC's Marrakech Partnership, the ITF helps foster exchanges between national governments and non-Party stakeholders, including cities, industry and civil society. At COP 29, the organisation launched a guide to support the integration of transport into countries' Nationally Determined Contributions. This is a step towards giving the sector the prominence it warrants in national decarbonisation plans.

Evidence remains the foundation of all effective policy. ITF's Transport Climate Action Directory is an open-access repository featuring over 80 mitigation measures across all transport modes. Among aviation-specific resources, it includes detailed information and references on strategies such as SAF deployment, improved aircraft efficiency and enhanced air traffic management. The directory, which was formally endorsed by UN Climate Change, is designed to help decision-makers identify and implement the most impactful options in accordance with national context and priorities.

Sustainability and equity go hand in hand. The ITF works with member countries to assess investment pathways, facilitate knowledge exchange, and provide capacity-building opportunities. We also advocate for a just transition: one that respects workers, strengthens communities, and ensures that the benefits of sustainable mobility are shared widely.

Working with the private sector is another integral part of ITF's approach. The ITF Corporate Partnership Board, established in 2013, aims to bring business leaders into the policy conversation. It has supported projects on automation, artificial intelligence, shared mobility and emerging business models. It also provides a platform to amplify innovative solutions from the Global South and promote inclusion, focusing on gender equality and youth engagement.

There is no single pathway to decarbonising aviation. But there is a shared responsibility to act. The ITF remains committed to supporting this transformation, both as a source of policy insight and as a platform for collaboration. With the support of our broad network of partner governments and organisations, including ICAO, we can believe in a future where transport systems connect the world in efficient, accessible, and sustainable ways.