



**Keynote Address  
by the Secretary General of ICAO,  
Mr. Juan Carlos Salazar  
to the ACI LAC/World Annual General Assembly**

***Runway to Recovery:  
Reconnecting aviation for a sustainable future***

**DISCUSSION ON THE FUTURE OF AVIATION**

*(Cancun, Mexico, 23 November 2021)*

1. It's a great honour for me to address this event today, and a tremendous pleasure to be here with you in person.
2. I think our presence here together is a very tangible sign of the recovery now steadily progressing all over the world, one which ICAO and its partnering agencies in the United Nations are doing their very best to accelerate and augment through our ongoing contributions in aviation, tourism, and public health and vaccine distribution.
3. Despite some substantial volatility over 2021, during the summer, noticeable improvements were observed in international travel.
4. This was especially evident on short haul international routes in areas such as Europe, or right here in the North American, Central American and Caribbean region.
5. Seat capacity in Latin America and the Caribbean has jumped by more than 14% in just the last month, for example, and latest figures globally also point to a pick-up in both domestic and international traffic during the end-of-year holiday period.
6. As the early signs of recovery we are now seeing begin to expand in their scope and significance, our innovation and agility will be put to the test in terms of how we pivot and build back better.

7. The Ministerial Declaration adopted at our High-level Conference on COVID-19 one month ago clearly demonstrated the strong political commitment and resolve of States and all industry stakeholders to restore aviation air connectivity safely and efficiently, and to build its resilience and sustainability.
8. **In the first place**, we have to oversee the safe recovery of aviation, managing the path from standards alleviations back to full ICAO compliance, and overseeing an industry facing unparalleled financing and resource challenges.
9. We are also confronted with the safety reality that over the last few years the overall number of accidents has been slowly rising for scheduled commercial operations.
10. Considering this, alongside the fact that runway excursions and incursions are among the high-risk categories identified in the current Global Aviation Safety Plan (GASP), and that two of the four fatal accidents in 2020 for scheduled commercial operations were associated with runway excursions, the need to maintain a focus on this important topic is obvious.
11. ICAO has been partnering very successfully with ACI on a new Global Reporting Format (GRF) for runway surface conditions, and we are also updating our global runway safety action plan.
12. Throughout the pandemic, ICAO has been very active in monitoring and identifying safety risks, and addressing several safety risks for airports in the comprehensive and dedicated airport guidance module of the CART Task Force, as well as in our new Aerodrome Restart Implementation Package, or iPack.
13. **A second key priority** going forward will be to assure a modernized recovery for every stage of the passenger experience, addressing both aviation security and traveler health priorities.
14. The aviation security domain had already been generating very high levels of innovation even before the pandemic, due to the constantly emerging issues it confronts.
15. This is why innovation has been playing such a key part at our Global Aviation Security Symposiums for many years now. And we will need to continue to engage very closely with industry and regulators to enable the new technologies and solutions needed to assure future vigilance and resilience.

16. Another important contribution ICAO has made to enhance passenger confidence in contactless and secure aviation processes are the new specifications for the ICAO Visible Digital Seal for encoding personal health proofs.
17. The VDS provides for mutually-recognized global trust and acceptance in these proofs and certifications, safeguarding data and privacy and greatly improving passenger confidence in international travel options.
18. The VDS is also an excellent example of how our passenger security, processing, and health screening objectives will become far more integrated and synergistic moving forward, and a key aspect of aviation's post-pandemic new normal.
19. The incredible pace of innovation now ongoing in aircraft design and operations will pose **a third major challenge** to airports in the years ahead, impacting many areas of air transport safety, efficiency, and sustainability.
20. ICAO provisions have already been developed for airports to accommodate new commercial aircraft equipped with folding wingtips, which are expected to be in commercial services very soon. These will have positive impacts on airfield infrastructure utilization and capacity at some of the world's busiest airports.
21. Work is also currently in progress on provisions for airports to accommodate unmanned and remotely piloted aircraft (UA / RPA), advanced air mobility (AAM), and the transition to vertiport as well as traditional airport operations.
22. Airports will be provided with a global framework for integrating these new aircraft in heliport/vertiport operations. And by standardizing these rules, we can best assure the safe and efficient development of the emerging unmanned aviation industry.
23. In the not-too-distant future, it's envisaged that airports could also serve as spaceports, and ICAO has received an increasing number of inquiries to establish guidance on commercial space launch sites at or near airport facilities.
24. A last development I'd refer to in this context concerns the possibility of air traffic services being provided from remote sites, combining services from multiple airports in one cost effective facility.

25. This evolution is quite likely, and would see the iconic air traffic control tower becoming a thing of the past.
26. **Underscoring all of these developments** of course is the imperative for our sector to decrease and ultimately eliminate its carbon footprint, as has been called for very strongly of late by countries.
27. Airports will have an important role to play in deploying renewable energies for greener operations, supporting new aircraft procedures to further decrease noise and emissions, and addressing the entire airport ecosystem holistically in terms of airside and landside opportunities for increased sustainability.
28. This explains why ICAO has been conducting seminars on green airports since 2017, together with the comprehensive range of documents and circulars we've published on everything from environmental airport planning to community engagement, in addition to the Eco-Airport Toolkit we developed featuring practical ready-to-deploy options and case studies.
29. This work is in addition to the coalitions of partners and donors we've been building to drive progress and capacity building in this area, and which has seen numerous successes in recent years with solar-at-gate and other developments.
30. Since becoming Secretary General of ICAO earlier this year, it's been my unceasing priority to assure the Organization becomes continuously more agile and results-based in everything it devotes its resources toward.
31. This includes the current and highest priority we share to achieve the full recovery of international flights, and a sustainable and resilient future for global aviation.
32. We're undertaking many transformations internally to refocus and retool ourselves to become a more responsive and effective partner with Member States, industry, and international partnering organizations, and to successfully lead the global air transport community in reuniting people, societies, and economies again.

33. This shared objective to reconnect the world is a tremendous challenge and a solemn responsibility, but I am more reassured than ever today that we have the solidarity and capacity to assure our success, and that global recovery could accelerate and be realized more quickly than many now anticipate.
34. In concluding today, I would be remiss not to highlight how ACI has been such an actively engaged partner in so many of our activities and objectives, representing the voice of the world's airports on a number of key ICAO panels and informing everything we do concerning airports and their operations.
35. In fact, an example of this cooperation will be the conclusion of an agreement later today on the establishment of the ACI-ICAO TRAINAIR PLUS Programme (TPP) Dual Recognition Alliance, which will offer TRAINAIR Plus Programme Members involved in airport operations and management training activities, an additional recognition from the two Organizations.
36. In the weeks ahead, ACI and ICAO will be making more progress on a new methodology to manage airport obstacles, but this is just one of countless other areas where ICAO will be depending on the continued partnership and expertise of the global airport community.
37. Much of the expertise which ACI delivers to ICAO also comes directly from you, its members, and so my appreciation go out to all of you as well.
38. I wish to thank you again for the opportunity to address this event today, and I look forward to hearing more about the thought-provoking discussions that will take place over the next two days here in Cancun.
39. Thank you.