

**Message from the Secretary General of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO),
Mr. Renato Cláudio Costa Pereira,
for the worldwide celebration of
International Civil Aviation Day on 7 December 2001**

Suicidal terrorist attacks, in which aircraft are used as flying bombs aimed at civilian targets, have emerged as the largest threat ever to the security of our friendly skies.

We have begun the process of understanding, internalising and acting on this new, awesome reality. Within hours of the 11 September attacks, Member States of ICAO implemented exceptional security procedures. A few weeks later, at the 33rd Session of their Assembly, they agreed on long-term steps, including an international, high-level, ministerial conference to develop measures for “preventing, combatting and eradicating acts of terrorism involving civil aviation”. The future-oriented conference will be held 19 and 20 February 2002.

Prevention must remain our first priority. Ultimately, we should consider a new global security culture, which adapts to and builds on the best practices of the past and which includes: the judicious use of new technologies like biometrics and machine readable travel documents (MRTDs); seamless communication channels between the air transport industry, immigration, and law enforcement authorities; better hiring and training methods for security personnel at airports; flexible and fool-proof operating standards that keep pace with the tactics of terrorists; a mindset that takes nothing for granted and that places the protection of human life above all other considerations.

This can best be achieved by tapping the brains of specialists from every field of human endeavour, inside as well as outside the aviation world. We must challenge them to develop a system which makes it impossible for a terrorist to board an aircraft and, should they still slip through the net, that can neutralize them immediately. In so doing, we must strike a balance between concern for increased security and the desire of passengers for speedy and hassle-free travel.

Finally, we must exercise strong political will and commit to such a system with all of the required financial and human resources. Whatever the cost, it certainly will be an extremely small fraction of the financial implications of lethal terrorist attacks.

“Flight between nations – Dialogue between peoples” captures the essence of international civil aviation. It is our collective responsibility to ensure that it thrives in the decades to come, for the benefit of all inhabitants of our planet.