

ICAO: FORGING CLOSER COOPERATION GLOBALLY FOR A STRONGER AVIATION INDUSTRY

Raymond Benjamin, Secretary-General of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), believes that facilitating global cooperation, tightening links to the industry and increasing information exchange are key to the development of a safe, secure and sustainable air transport system.

The past year saw several incidents and rising concerns with deep impact on aviation: The volcanic eruptions of Iceland's Mt. Eyjafjallajökull which grounded flights worldwide; attempted terrorist attacks on aircraft; the challenge of building the necessary pool of aviation professionals; and the increasing threat of global warming. At such a pivotal juncture for aviation, Raymond Benjamin, with over 30 years' experience as a high-level administrator in the aviation sector, aims for ICAO to play a leading role in uniting the aviation community in tackling the challenges ahead.

Benjamin shares with *Bridging Skies* his vision, priorities and plans for ICAO in tackling the future challenges with the global aviation community.

Tell us what are the ICAO's most pressing priorities right now?



One is to provide all our member states with a sound return on the money and the trust they continually invest in ICAO by prioritising our work and directing resources towards achieving optimal effectiveness and efficiency in the pursuit of three strategic objectives: Safety, security, and environmental protection and sustainable development of air transport. This means simplifying and modernising practices and procedures, maximising the use of

technology and enhancing coordination and communications.

Secondly, we have to build even closer ties with the industry. If we are to maintain a vibrant and current global regulatory framework, we cannot do without input from parties such as airlines, airports and air navigation services providers. Gone are the days when the expertise required was available from civil aviation authorities alone. Success in the 21st century belongs to global cooperation.

A third priority builds on and supports the first two: Transparency and information sharing. In this age of instantaneous data transmission, ICAO needs to break down all barriers to accessibility with the aid of stakeholders and even the public. This way, we will be able to generate support and active participation in efforts to enhance aviation worldwide.

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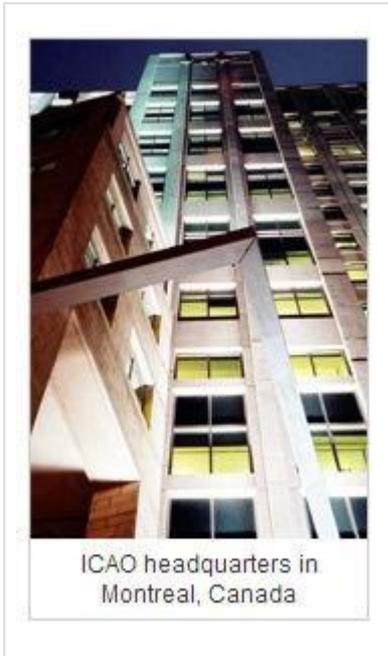
What is your vision for ICAO?

I want ICAO to be recognised for providing consistent and timely leadership in tackling obstacles that hinder the world aviation community from meeting the expectations of the public to creating a safe, secure and sustainable air transport system.

You mentioned ICAO's strategic focus on safety, security, and environmental protection and sustainable development of air transport earlier. How do you think ICAO's paradigm can be promulgated further afield by member states like Singapore?

I think Singapore has done well especially in this area. Moving beyond ICAO's structure of regulation and strategic planning, Singapore actively promotes the aims and objectives of ICAO by sponsoring numerous conferences and meetings, by offering fellowships to its aviation academy and by continuing its critical participation in the development and implementation of contingency plans for pandemics.

Considering ICAO's many initiatives for flight security, what are your thoughts on the current state of aviation security and how can it be enhanced in the near future?



While security today has been much improved, aviation is still vulnerable to new and emerging threats such as terrorism and pandemics. As such, ICAO's ultimate objective is to protect passengers from these threats through innovative and proactive strategies while still ensuring that their flight experiences are seamless. Our role comes down to facilitating cooperation and information sharing among international aviation players. That being said, we need to expand our information gathering systems and networks. We must tap non-traditional sources of expertise and data, reach outside the box. We have to become adept at anticipating what may come next rather than reacting to threats.

As it becomes increasingly important for all industries, including aviation, to protect the environment and reduce fuel usage, what are your

thoughts on green aviation and its future?

This is one area where we have been very successful in applying the principles of transparency and global cooperation I have described thus far. Not only is aviation the only sector that has a definite plan of action for dealing with greenhouse gas emissions on a global basis, we are also setting the stage for integrating alternative fuels in a comprehensive programme to minimise the impact of air transport on the environment. As proud of our achievements as we should be, we nevertheless acknowledge that much remains to be done on the road to a carbon free aviation environment.

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With aviation poised to expand dramatically in the future, there will be a need to boost manpower numbers. How does the aviation industry hope to achieve this?

Our foremost challenge is to supply this demand. The aviation industry will require hundreds of thousands of pilots, mechanics and controllers in the next few years. The other challenge we have is to make aviation exciting again, or else a shortage of qualified people will stunt the growth and the sustainability of air transport at a time when new blood is needed the most.

Looking ahead, what is your vision of aviation in the future?

I am both an optimist and a realist. I see a bright future for aviation in terms of contributing to the economic and personal well-being of states and individuals around the world. This will only come about, however, through persistence and solidarity. Aviation is and has always been a collective effort. That is the basis on which our future will be measured. The ICAO of the future must therefore continue to fulfil its vital role as a global rassembleur and adapt to new and pressing demands from all stakeholders, including passengers.