

LESSONS IN SOLIDARITY: TURNING SILOS INTO SOLUTIONS



What collective wisdom can the global aviation sector draw from ICAO's recent initiatives to foster greater unity and mature the political frameworks supporting global aviation

progress? ICAO Secretary General Raymond Benjamin shared his thoughts with Bridging Skies.

The IATA figures for 2011 are encouraging. It was the safest year in aviation since 1945, when air safety record keeping first began. This latest success was achieved through a conscientious global effort, coordinated by various agencies and international bodies.

One such effort was the first-ever joint conference held between ICAO and WCO in July 2012, organised by Singapore's Ministry of Transport in its ongoing support of the 80 ICAO Working Groups which work towards the advancement of international aviation policies.

This landmark conference heralded a new level of collaboration and dialogue between transport authorities. Influential entities such as the International Air Transport Association, International Maritime Organization, Universal Postal Union and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will now be more routinely engaged in close cooperation to identify new areas of study and development to enhance supply chain safety and efficiency.

One of the key drivers of this new and unprecedented level of multipartite collaboration is Raymond Benjamin, Secretary General of ICAO. His first three-year term, which ended March 2012, saw him successfully driving forward his organisation's three strategic objectives during that period, namely:

- Safety
- Security
- Environmental protection and the sustainable development of air transport\

The results of these efforts have so far been very positive. So, what can the industry look forward to during Mr Benjamin's next term, which will come to a conclusion in 2015?

Bridging Skies and Mindsets

For the coming triennium, ICAO will be pursuing five rather than three strategic objectives to better reflect the full scope of its current ambitions for the global air transport system.

Safety remains the first and most fundamental strategic objective of ICAO, reflecting its critical relevance to all other aviation considerations. The organisation's priorities in this area include addressing identified Significant Safety Concerns (SSCs) promptly and sector-wide, progressing all States to a minimum level of 60% implementation of ICAO's safety oversight recommendations, and advancing more developed States to full risk-based safety management through the wider implementation of ICAO's State Safety Programmes.

Given the organisation's efforts to create closer strategic links between safety and operational progress, the second ICAO strategic objective will focus on the important air navigation capacity and efficiency challenges that will arise due to aviation's continued and significant growth. This objective ties in directly to ICAO's new Block Upgrade systems engineering strategy for harmonised operational modernisation on a global basis, which will be submitted for State endorsement at the 12th Air Navigation Conference, a one-in-a-decade event, later this year.

"ICAO is aligning its strategic objectives and coordinating interrelated efforts more than ever before," began Benjamin, "and this is especially true with respect to safety and operational modernisation. Through consensus with industry we have established the technological roadmap to achieve a more efficient 'one sky' approach that will save time, money and harmful emissions on a system-wide basis."

The third objective for ICAO will be security and facilitation, reflecting the new trend toward developing more win-win solutions that continue to keep passengers, aircraft and cargo secure without impeding the speed, comfort and convenience which sets air travel apart from other modes of transportation. ICAO's High-level Aviation Security Conference in September 2012 consolidated findings from a series of regional ICAO events preceding it and established greater global consensus on the dual priorities which will now be the measure of progress in this area. Improved supply-chain security is a key objective that will benefit from these efforts in the months and years ahead.

ICAO's fourth objective focuses on the economic development of aviation and associated policy implications. Benjamin stressed that more priority will be accorded to economic issues including fair competition and financing.

"Aviation's role in social and economic development globally is too critical to jeopardise with approaches that do not take into account the full range of sustainable criteria, including

economic viability,” he noted. “In 2013, we will be holding a landmark Air Transport Conference addressing areas such as air carrier ownership and control, market access, consumer protection and taxation, the underlying goal being a transition away from the historic and fragmented bilateral approach and towards a truly multilateral framework. This will be a big step for many States but ICAO believes the time is right to drive this change.”

Environmental protection is the fifth objective, highlighting ICAO’s continuing role in determining a global approach to emissions and noise mitigation. The last ICAO Assembly gave the organisation a mandate to address aviation’s carbon footprint through a variety of measures, including advanced technologies, improved operational and procedural efficiency and sustainable alternative fuels.

“Member States agreed to an aspirational goal of two percent fuel efficiency improvement by 2020, and to pursue carbon neutral growth from 2020,” Benjamin recalled. “We also requested Action Plans from our Member States with respect to their specific carbon reduction strategies and this programme has so far been very successful in moving things forward. Perhaps most importantly in the environmental area, ICAO’s actions on Market-Based Measures (MBM) are ongoing and Member States are eager to see a global solution for this. The ICAO Council has been reviewing several MBM options and narrowed them down to three possible schemes. More progress is expected prior to and during the 2013 General Assembly,” Benjamin shared. In addition, ICAO will be establishing a voluntary global assistance fund to bridge the divide between the political will to embrace change, shortages of needed resources, and being more proactive in engaging other transport sectors toward global, mutually beneficial objectives. “All countries, regardless of their status as developed or developing, have reaffirmed that ICAO is the only forum that can determine effective global solutions,” Benjamin highlighted. “But the devil is in the details.”

Addressing Invisible Barriers

Through his organisation’s five strategic objectives, the ICAO Secretary General hopes to galvanise his Member States toward greater cooperation, empathy and compromise. He intends to foster a more inclusive disposition towards both aviation and non-aviation transport sectors, and to create greater avenues for collaborative problem solving, growth and progress. Recounting a recent debate on MBMs, wherein there was a suggestion to study what type of commonalities can be distilled from the Common But Differentiated Responsibility (CBDR) and Non-Discriminatory schools of thought, Benjamin noted that the goal of all States is to achieve sustainable aviation growth satisfying economic, environmental and social criteria. “My goal for our Member States is for all to show increased solidarity,” he concluded. “We are from the same aviation family with a common objective, and our cause is a just one. Air transport is at a crossroads today and there is an important political maturation which needs to occur both operationally and economically to ensure that the impending changes are as mutually beneficial as possible. This is a critical time for ICAO and for the world, and the entire aviation community is eager to move forward on the challenges before us.”