

# A NEW Beginning

I was privileged to hear Raymond Benjamin, the new secretary general for the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), give his first public address. For those who know the international aviation system well, the speech signaled an important change in direction. It is a change that focuses on collaboration between nations and industry, and will address transparency and the management of risk. ICAO was not built to be swift, but with this leadership it can be relevant.

One of the most interesting parts of the speech was his proclamation that ICAO will become directly involved with sharing safety information. Secretary General Benjamin said, "The third very promising area for improving aviation safety is the sharing of safety-related information, a concept the aviation community has been steadily moving toward. This is perhaps the area I am most excited about. We have the ability now to utilize a huge volume of data to provide information, which will assist the global community in determining *risk*. Safety *risk*."

There are some pretty big points covered by that statement. For one, ICAO is truly embracing the notion of managing risk, no longer just talking about safety management systems but actually participating. That is a courageous step for a United Nations organization. Imagine going into a meeting of international politicians and telling them that some of them have a far greater risk of a plane crash than others. That is a tough thing to do, but ICAO is stepping forward to do it.

It is also interesting to see where ICAO is going regarding the use of safety information. For much of the organization's history, nations' noncompliance with its standards was disclosed voluntarily by

states in the form of a statement of "differences." Next, ICAO began auditing states, but those data initially were kept secret. And while those audits eventually became more transparent, the information provided still was insufficient to manage risk.

Now, ICAO is looking at pulling together data from both regulators and operators to get a more comprehensive picture of where the safety risk really is. This is a big deal. ICAO is positioned to do this in a way that no one else can. As a U.N. organization, ICAO has the legal ability to protect the information given to it. National laws do not apply. If ICAO's member states decide that it should be the repository of safety information, operators and regulators can send that information without fear of disclosure or prosecution. If some of these data were integrated in a sensible way, it could give us early insights about safety issues as they emerge around the world, alerting us when regions start losing ground.

There are countless details to be settled, but what is important is the new direction that ICAO is taking, the new role it is embracing. It is a role the organization ultimately may be well suited for, a role that could make it an active participant in the global safety system. I encourage all of you to give ICAO's leaders your support and give their ideas a chance. This could be the start of something big.



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