




“PUBLIC TRUST, RAPID RESPONSE”

An Interview with Raymond Benjamin, Secretary General
of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)

 The Secretary General of ICAO is head of the Secretariat and chief executive officer of the Organization, providing leadership to a specialized international staff working in the field of international civil aviation.

Raymond Benjamin became Secretary General in 2009 and has served two consecutive three-year terms. Beginning in August this year, he will be succeeded by the first woman to be elected ICAO Secretary General, Dr. Fang Liu of China.

This is the first of a new series of interviews with ICAO leaders.



EDITOR: ICAO and the global aviation community have been confronted with some serious and seemingly unprecedented issues in the past year and a half. What is your view of the responses to date and the framework being developed for further development?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: International civil aviation came face-to-face with two very high-profile emerging safety and security issues in 2014, issues characterized by distinct challenges which ICAO and the global air transport community have been very focused on in recent months.

And while we have benefitted from a number of important lessons learned in the aftermath of the tragic losses of MH370 and MH17 last year, it is nonetheless equally critical to keep these incidents and the actions we are taking to address them in proper perspective with respect to our wider strategic planning.

The disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 and the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17 raised important concerns with respect to the public's trust in air transport. Perhaps first among the lessons learned from these two incidents, and especially MH370, is the recognition that our sector must respond rapidly, even to extremely rare accident events in our network, when there is a question of public trust involved. This is why ICAO rapidly convened a sectoral response and brought related proposals to the attention of the High-Level Safety Conference (HLSC) less than a year after these incidents took place.

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EDITOR: The tracking issue has attracted the most publicity. The media and the flying public seemed astonished that a civil aircraft could simply disappear.

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: You will recall the media frenzy MH370 generated terms such as “unprecedented” and “mysterious” in relation to its disappearance. In fact, the probability of a flight vanishing in this manner is upwards of a one-in-100-million chance when you consider the vast number of flights we safely manage year after year.

And yet as soon as it became apparent that MH370 was no ordinary accident, and that the public's trust in the safety and effectiveness of our network had been called into question, ICAO, ACI [Airports Council International], CANSO [Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation], and IATA [International Air Transport Association] rapidly convened a high-level meeting to discuss an appropriate sectoral response.

The fruit of ICAO's labours was the concept of operations for what we have now termed our Global Aeronautical Distress and Safety System, or GADSS. Over time, GADSS will lead to greater tracking frequency and precision under distress conditions.

All of this work was begun in May of 2014, and less than one year later, at ICAO's High-Level Safety Conference this past February, over 120 ICAO Member States and 30 international organizations recommended the adoption of the GADSS.

EDITOR: The GADSS concept proposes a 15-minute global flight tracking standard for normal operations. What is the rationale for this timeframe?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: The initial 15-minute tracking requirement, applicable to commercial fleets as of November 2016, responds directly to the public expectation that we improve aircraft location finding over remote and oceanic airspace. We also see this as an important first step in terms of laying the foundation for future tracking enhancement.

We have also recommended the implementation of a one-minute aircraft tracking requirement under distress or abnormal flight conditions. This more precise capability, because it will require new aircraft equipment in many cases, has been agreed to become applicable to new aircraft entering service as of 2021.

Importantly, both the 15-minute and one-minute tracking proposals are performance-based, meaning that airlines are free to use the technologies and services they deem most cost-effective when meeting the new requirements. Performance-based standards also carry the benefit of not restricting future innovation, so that airlines can continue to seek the latest and best technologies as they upgrade or renew their fleets.

EDITOR: What happens next with the tracking initiative?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: ICAO is presently coordinating an implementation assistance exercise in the Asia-Pacific region. The region was selected for these exercises mainly due to the size of its airspace, and we presently expect a dozen or more world airlines and a wide range of aircraft types and configurations to participate.

ARINC [Aeronautical Radio Inc.], SITA [Société Internationale de Télécommunication Aéronautique], INMARSAT, and other communications providers are already coming forward with tracking solution packages, and it is our hope that some or all of these companies will participate in our trials. The exercise will be completed by late summer with its results going on to our Air Navigation Commission, then ultimately the ICAO Council, so as to inform what it ultimately adopts by end-November.

EDITOR: How does ICAO reconcile these emergency responses with its longer-term planning? Don't the GASP and the GANP already guide the Organization's actions on a more strategic basis?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: Yes, they do. And ICAO had already formulated performance planning and technology roadmaps that would have realized a global flight tracking capability for aviation. This came after comprehensive consultations with States and industry between 2011 and 2013, a process perhaps best exemplified by our successful Global Air Navigation Industry Symposium in 2011.

We undertook all of this work in connection with the 2013 revision of our *Global Air Navigation Plan*, or GANP. The GANP, together with its companion document the *Global Aviation Safety Plan* (GASP), are ICAO's chief response to the need for long-term strategic planning for global aviation safety and efficiency.

The loss of public trust over the disappearance of MH370 simply accelerated the implementation of one aspect of the strategic performance improvements aviation had already set out.

Separate work carried out under ICAO's *Flight Data Recovery and Triggered Transmission of Flight Data* working groups, convened subsequent to the recommendations contained in the BEA accident report on AF447, had already advanced related planning on items such as accident site locating, underwater locator beacons, and deployable flight recorders.

This, then, is why we are describing the 15-minute tracking requirement for 2016 as a 'foundation' or 'first-step' with respect to a more comprehensive tracking capability and framework which will eventually be realized.

EDITOR: The second major emerging issue pertained to the loss of MH17 and the risks to civil aviation arising from conflict zones. What strategy is ICAO pursuing in this regard?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: The Conference's main recommendation was for ICAO to develop and host a centralized online repository where States, operators, and applicable organizations could share up-to-date conflict zone risk information. The ICAO Council subsequently endorsed this recommendation and, as of early April, access to the repository has been readily available on the homepage of the ICAO website (<http://www.icao.int/czir/Pages/default.aspx>). The goal of this portal is to facilitate and enhance conflict zone risk assessments by States and operators.

While considering these recommendations, the Council was guided by two fundamental principles of the Chicago Convention:

- First, that States are responsible for the safety of civil aviation operations in their respective airspace;
- And second, that airspace users are ultimately responsible for deciding where they can operate safely.

This decision and process once again point to the air transport sector's commitment to respond rapidly when needed, but always within the limits and respectful of the principles which have long made aviation a force for positive, consensus-driven progress in the world.

EDITOR: More recently, the Germanwings 9525 tragedy raised yet another rare issue.

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: ICAO has been seeking to draw greater attention to the importance of mental health assessments for licensed aviation personnel since 2009, and we will continue to do so. But I also wish to stress in this regard that determining mental health to any practical extent is a very complex medical challenge, and that airlines, pilots, and others can only react to what the best medical approaches make available to us.

EDITOR: Since the 1st HLSC in 2010, what success has been achieved in addressing the "big three" safety targets?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: Having analyzed safety data for many years now, and working collaboratively with industry operators to share accident information and results, our sector identified three high-fatality accident categories which we are now working on collaboratively. These are:

- Runway incursions and excursions
- Controlled Flight into Terrain, or CFIT
- and Loss of Control Inflight, or LOC-I

These efforts have seen some clear results. ICAO has been working since 2010 with ACI, IATA, and 10 other national, regional and international organizations to reduce runway incursions and excursions. Runway-related fatalities have decreased from 179 in 2010 to just one in 2014. Similarly, we have seen the CFIT fatality rate drop by almost 85 per cent. The number of LOC-I accidents, meanwhile, has been cut in half over the same period.

“Strategic planning and collaboration is precisely how we will continue to make aviation even safer in the years ahead.”

These are not the results or objectives of a sector in crisis. They are the product of determined and strategic planning and collaboration, and that is precisely how we will continue to make aviation even safer in the years ahead.

EDITOR: Looking now to the Security and Facilitation domain, cybersecurity is an issue which is showing up more often in the news with hacks on government and other high-profile computing systems. How is ICAO addressing this threat?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: ICAO is coordinating in this area with ACI, CANSO, IATA, and the ICCAIA [International Coordinating Council of Aerospace Industries Associations], based on an agreement we signed in late 2014. Our organizations will now be more proactive in sharing critical information such as threat identification, risk assessments, and cybersecurity best practices.

We will also be encouraging more substantial coordination at the State level, notably between our respective government and industry stakeholders on all cybersecurity strategies, policies, and plans.

But we should also acknowledge, once again, that established policies and principles [in Annex 17 on Security] will provide us with a solid foundation to start from, especially so as to ensure the global harmonization aspects which are ICAO's chief responsibility.

EDITOR: Air passenger traffic is expected to reach more than six billion by 2030. What are some of the implications of this doubling of traffic?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: The global challenges we have in common will require a unified approach supported by practical implementation assistance. The implications of such traffic growth are multiple and interrelated, as we well know. They point to: increased airspace and airport congestion, with risks to the safety, security and efficiency of air operations; growing environmental pressures; and the need for massive investments in ground infrastructure and air navigation systems.

ICAO, its Member States, and industry have made substantial progress over the years in coming to grips with the myriad issues underlying the long-term viability of airports, airlines, and other operators. These issues include market access, air carrier ownership and control, fair and equitable competition, rationalized consumer protection regimes, and minimized taxes and levies.

EDITOR: What are some things happening with regard to the ground side of aviation?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: From a user's perspective, airports are in one sense our 'first responders' with respect to what we all strive for in aviation – a seamless system of services for passengers and shippers. In this context, the quality and availability of services at an airport often dictates whether there will be repeat business. Ease of use, friendliness, commercial activities, efficient customs and immigration, cargo handling, parking ... any one of these elements can make or break a passenger's air travel experience.

Over the years, in close cooperation with respective Member States and our close colleagues at ACI, ICAO has developed a number of strategies and policies to further enhance an airport's ability to meet the demands of a growing and competitive marketplace.

The first of these deals with the ownership and control structure of facilities. Because of the growing requirement for significant investments to support new airport development and infrastructure, private interests are increasingly involved in financing such projects. Commercialization, privatization, and public-private partnerships furthermore make it easier to integrate proven business and management models to ensure that airports remain competitive with one another.

EDITOR: And where does liberalization fit into the equation?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: The concept of 'connectivity' that has become so relevant to air transport economics in recent years implies that we are all partners – States, airlines, airports, air navigation service providers, and users – and that we share the responsibility for maintaining the healthy development of our industry.

ICAO continues to strongly support agreements and measures aimed at accelerating the process of liberalization and optimized connectivity. ICAO also recognizes, however, that some emerging issues which can negatively impact liberalization, mainly relating to protectionism and slot access, are concerns not only in a region, but also where airlines fly to.

Currently, the vast majority of arrangements concerning routes are locked into bilateral Air Services Agreements. The key is to remove those bilateral restrictions that limit the availability of services for the end-user. Greater flexibility in these agreements increases demand and ensures that the services, which result in greater connectivity, are sustainable over the long-term for all stakeholders, including airports.



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In every instance we must strive for global harmonization of approaches and greater liberalization to best assure end-user satisfaction.

EDITOR: Despite the recent high-profile accidents, overall safety continues to improve.

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: Safety remains our top priority in civil aviation. As 2014 and its intense media spotlights have made very clear to us, the public trust which is so critical to air transport viability and profitability depends first and foremost on how safely we operate our global network.

Fortunately, we are very good at being safe. One could even say we have gotten too good given the sometimes nonsensical level of scrutiny our sector is now being held to.

Last year, despite all its publicized challenges, civil aviation achieved a global accident rate of just 3.0 accidents per million departures, the second-lowest ever recorded. And while fatalities were up in 2014, mainly due to the very uncharacteristic losses of MH370 and MH17, the total number of fatal accidents also decreased to just seven – the fewest we’ve seen since 2008.

EDITOR: Next year, the Assembly will resume discussions on market-based measures and other environmental issues.

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: In the environmental domain, ICAO continues to drive forward on the basket of measures relating to biofuels development, improved operations, and other initiatives which have been supported by recent ICAO Assemblies. We have realized a number of important achievements in setting Standards on aircraft noise and emissions, and we are currently finalizing a first-ever CO₂ certification standard for aircraft.

We are also progressing our work on an aviation Market-Based Measure (MBM), and conducting a series of MBM Global Aviation Dialogues (GLADs) this spring to raise awareness on it in every ICAO Region.

We are reviewing best practices and lessons learned in order to assist States and operators as they engage local communities regarding aircraft operations, noise, emissions and local air quality, in close coordination with ACI.

EDITOR: ICAO has also devoted considerable attention to upgrading the airspace infrastructure.

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: Air traffic management (ATM) coordination advances must move forward hand-in-hand with airport development to achieve optimum network expansion results, and ICAO’s guidance on the flexible use of civil-military airspace can also play an important role here.

I would add that ICAO is also continuing to progress its work on Air Traffic Flow Management (ATFM) and other capacity/efficiency priorities, and that these and other elements of our

recently revised *Global Air Navigation Plan* (GANP) should be considered with respect to all related long-term planning – both at the State and regional levels.

EDITOR: There’s a lot on ICAO’s plate. How does the industry make this all happen?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: Progress on all of the priorities will require not only that we determine practical standards and guidance, but also that our Member States have the tools and proficiencies they need to effectively put those provisions into practice.

The Council President has made it his clear priority that ICAO stay closely focused on providing and coordinating the implementation assistance and capacity-building resources many of our States require. ICAO recognizes that only by succeeding on this goal will we be able to ensure that *No Country is Left Behind* where the significant social and economic benefits of air transport are concerned.

A comprehensive list of ICAO implementation resources is now available under the recently developed *No Country Left Behind* section of our public website – <http://www.icao.int/about-icao/NCLB/Pages/default.aspx>.

EDITOR: Any final thoughts?

RAYMOND BENJAMIN: This will likely be my last opportunity to address readers as Secretary General. I wish to underline that it has been my great honour to serve ICAO, and the global air transport sector it supports, for so many years now.

The commitment and achievements supporting the growth of civil aviation over the last few decades are truly to be commended, and further collaboration and consensus, through ICAO, will continue to be your best path forward.

I wish you only the greatest success in the years ahead. ■



Secretary General Raymond Benjamin was born in Alexandria, Egypt, and holds French citizenship. Trained in public law and international relations, he became involved with the Civil Aviation Administration of France and subsequently the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC).

From 1989-94, he was Chief of ICAO’s Aviation Security Branch, and from 1994-2007 Executive Secretary of the ECAC, developing policy advice and strategic options on safety, security, and environmental issues.

Prior to becoming ICAO Secretary General in 2009, Benjamin was Special Adviser to the Joint Aviation Authorities Training Organization and the European Aviation Security Training Institute.