

**REMARKS OF AMBASSADOR DONALD T. BLISS,
PERMANENT U.S. REPRESENTATIVE TO ICAO
AT THE INTERNATIONAL AVIATION CLUB LUNCHEON
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“The Changing Face of ICAO: A Tribute to President Kotaite.”

President Kotaite, Mrs. Kotaite, Secretary Coleman, Administrator Blakey, distinguished guests at the head of the table. Fellow members of the International Aviation Club and guests.

Let me also welcome my predecessors, Ambassador Edward Stimpson, Representative Carol Carmody, and Commissioner Steve Creamer, who represents the United States on ICAO’s Air Navigation Commission. Before joining the U.S. Mission Steve had a distinguished career at the FAA, spending many years in Alaska. He decided to move south to Montreal in search of warmer weather.

David, thank you for your most gracious introduction. Having been a member of the International Aviation Club for more than 25 years, it is a special privilege to stand behind this podium. Indeed, it was after an IAC luncheon last year that Under Secretary Jeff Shane suggested that I talk to Secretary Mineta about a potential job opportunity in Montreal. And thus began—for me—an incredible journey---a journey that now approaches a fork in the road. For this is a time of change for ICAO. The open question is: Can we build upon the strong foundation established by President Kotaite and meet the new challenges of international aviation in this second century of flight?

When President Roosevelt convened the first parties to the Chicago Convention in 1944, he had a grand vision for aviation. But it is Dr. Assad Kotaite, over the past 53 years, the last 30 as President of the Council, who has made that vision a reality. Yet, at the end of this month, Dr. Kotaite steps down, and the post-Kotaite era begins. It is difficult to capsule in a few words the

extraordinary contribution of Dr. Kotaite in forging international consensus on high standards of aviation safety, in addressing the post-September 11th challenges of aviation security, in prodding governments and industry to achieve tougher but balanced environmental standards, in promoting more efficient air transport and navigation, in managing crises and in building the legal framework of international aviation. In summarizing these areas of achievement, I have just spelled out the six strategic objectives of ICAO, as recently approved by the Council: Safety, Security, the environment, efficiency, continuity, and law.

For me, it has been a distinct honor to have served during the past two sessions of the 36-member Council, ICAO's Board of Directors, with Dr. Kotaite presiding. Watching Dr. Kotaite in action is a lesson in leadership.

As Council sessions, he is always well prepared, listens carefully to all points of view, treats each Council member with unfailing courtesy and respect, and then gently prods the Council toward a consensus that advances the public interest, rarely calling for a vote. With his lawyer's precision in five languages, he is able to articulate a decision that commands global acceptance. Regional divisions are minimized.

Importantly, Dr. Kotaite welcomes change, as long as it is grounded in an understanding of history. He recognizes that ICAO must adapt to the dramatically changing aviation environment.

Let me illustrate. ICAO is traditionally a standard setting organization having adopted some 10,000 standards, recommended practices and procedures. The key to a safer and more secure global aviation environment, however, requires that all 189 contracting States have the capacity, the resources, and the will to adhere to these standards. In 1999, therefore, ICAO established a safety audit program, which was expanded in 2004 to a comprehensive safety oversight audit that assesses each State's level of compliance with all the safety-related provisions of the Annexes to the Chicago Convention. Similarly, in November 2002, a security audit program was initiated.

These audits have revealed substantial deficiencies. Accordingly, ICAO is changing its focus from simply a standard setting organization to one that also facilitates technical assistance to States and regions to build their capacity to comply with international standards.

The harsh reality of the gap between standards and performance was manifested in a series of international aviation accidents in 2005. There were 18 larger aircraft * accidents with 713 fatalities in 2005 compared to 9 such accidents with 203 fatalities in 2004. This was a doubling in passenger fatalities from .01 to .02 per 100 million-kilometers. These trends were completely unacceptable to President Kofaite. He called for a Global Safety Conference in March, 2006, and 153 Nations and 26 International Organizations, a total of 567 participants, heeded his call. Administrator Blakey led the U.S. delegation. With the help of Bill Voss, Director of the Air Navigation Bureau, a comprehensive agenda to strengthen ICAO's role in enhancing Global Safety was prepared. The agenda would radically change the way ICAO operates to achieve specific safety improvements. On the conference agenda were the following proposals:

For the first time, ICAO proposed to release information on the results of safety audits to the public as well as to other States.

Second, ICAO would coordinate technical assistance to remedy safety deficiencies identified in audit reports.

Third, ICAO would assist States in developing performance-based safety management systems.

Fourth, ICAO would encourage the exchange of legally protected safety information and establish a Flight Safety Information Exchange.

* Maximum certificated take-off mass of more than 2250 kg.

Fifth, States would be encouraged to verify that the certification and licensing of other states meet ICAO standards.

Sixth, ICAO would provide all States with access to reliable and timely information on registration, ownership and control of aircraft used in international operations.

On the threshold issue of whether ICAO should release information to the public on the comprehensive safety audits, the States at the Conference expressed widely divergent views. Some States, which shall remain nameless, argued that releasing safety information to the public could destroy their fragile tourist industry. When there appeared to be no conceivable resolution in sight, Dr. Kotaite called for a coffee break. But first he asked essentially, “Why are you here? Why did you come to this Conference?” And then, after quoting from the Chicago Convention, “Can you in good conscience leave this Conference without making the skies safer for the traveling public?” “States do not fly in airplanes; people do.” When we came back from the break, Dr. Kotaite summarized the discussion and announced a consensus. States would agree to release safety audit information as quickly as possible but if some states needed time to get their house in order, they could have up to two years. Miraculously, State after State spoke in support of his consensus. The momentum of this dramatic moment carried the Conference through to a successful conclusion. All the key proposals were endorsed as consensus recommendations, and last month the Council adopted them as ICAO policy, establishing an action plan to implement them. Since the March conference, 76 nations have consented to the public release of safety audit information.

This is but one example of hundreds we could give where President Kotaite has forged a consensus that---to quote Abraham Lincoln---“brings out the better angels of our nature” and shows us that advancing the public interest is in all our interest. The skies are far safer, more secure and quieter due to his efforts.

Now, in fairness, I must add that while significant progress has been made in repositioning ICAO for the 21st Century, there are substantial challenges ahead. In addition to Dr. Kotaite's retirement, there will also be a substantial turnover in the senior director positions in the coming months. Bill Voss resignation to join the Flight Safety Foundation is a significant loss, although we welcome his continued dedication to aviation safety. A report of a task force on reorganizing the Secretariat is due in August, and a budget for the next triennium must find a way to reallocate very limited resources to achieve the six strategic objectives I mentioned earlier. This means reducing administrative overhead and attracting new technical competence. Whether ICAO can successfully implement the framework established over the past several months and reinvent itself for the 21st Century is the challenge we face on building on the legacy of President Kotaite. We are fortunate to have an experienced and capable successor in Roberto Kobeh Gonzalez of Mexico.

At this pivotal time, however, it is my distinct honor to introduce Dr. Assad Kotaite. Born and raised in Lebanon, educated in law in Beirut, Paris, and the Hague, Dr. Kotaite joined ICAO 53 years ago. He represented Lebanon on the Council, was elected Secretary General in 1970 and President in 1976. Cal Ripken's record pales by comparison. Dr. Kotaite is the Haile Selassie of International Organizations. Honored by many nations and universities, he has traveled to over 170 countries. He is joined today by his effervescent wife, Monique, the founder of the ICAO spouses club. Her friendly welcome and continuing caring interest in the families of all Council members has created an atmosphere of cooperative friendship--an ICAO extended family—that has greatly facilitated the work of her husband as a consensus builder. It is a pleasure to welcome them both to Washington.

Let's welcome President Kotaite.