



**Opening Remarks by
the Council President of the
International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)
Mr. Salvatore Sciacchitano,
Symposium on Assistance
to the Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families (AAAVF2024)**

(Haarlem, The Netherlands, 26 November 2024)

*Mr. Barry MADLENER, Minister of Infrastructure and Water Management, Netherlands,
[Mr. David Benito, Director General of Civil Aviation, Spain],
[Mr. Nicholas Robinson, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Safety and Security, Transport Canada],
Distinguished Representatives on the ICAO Council,
Distinguished guests and delegates,
Good morning,*

It is my great honour to welcome you to Haarlem for this ICAO Symposium on Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families. This second Symposium builds on our first event in Spain in 2021. That Symposium produced 30 vital recommendations which were considered by the 41st ICAO Assembly in 2022 and were consequently reflected in the Resolution A41-14 on Assistance to Victims of Aviation Accidents and their Families and have guided States and stakeholders in strengthening assistance measures,

I extend ICAO's deep appreciation to the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands for hosting this Symposium.

Let me also acknowledge the invaluable work of the Air Crash Victims' Families' Federation International. Your tireless advocacy serves as a beacon of hope for countless families worldwide. You remind us that behind every statistic, and the current safety statistics are good, there is a story, a loved one, and a family seeking answers and compassion.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence of the several National Associations of Families of victims of aviation accidents. I wish to present to each of your members on behalf of the ICAO Council and on behalf of the entire ICAO Organization the most sincere sympathy and the unwavering commitment to continue to pursue the highest level of safety and to pursue the aspirational goal to reach zero fatalities in civil aviation.

Aviation safety and security is truly a team effort. This same spirit of collaboration must extend to ensuring the rights of aircraft accident victims and their families in the aftermath of tragic events.

Our journey towards this objective began in 1976, when Annex 13 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation first included provisions for family assistance, allowing accident victims' home countries to participate in investigations.

A second major step forward then came at the 32nd Assembly Session in 1998, which established three key principles:

Firstly, the State where an accident occurs must address the most critical needs of persons affected by a civil aviation accident;

Secondly, that the policy of ICAO should be to ensure that the mental, physical and spiritual well-being of victims involved in civil aviation accidents and their families are considered and accommodated by ICAO and its Contracting States; and

Thirdly, that States should work to align their approaches to assisting victims of civil aviation accidents and their families.

The Assembly called on States to support victims and their families, urging them to develop and implement effective support programs.

The 32nd Session of the Assembly also urged the ICAO Council to develop materials to assist States.

Since then, ICAO has taken significant steps. In 2013, we approved two landmark documents: our Policy on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and their Families, and our Manual on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and their Families.

This Manual provides comprehensive guidance for States and organizations. It helps ensure adequate assistance, and encourages States to incorporate ICAO's policies in their legislation and procedures.

Two key provisions in Annex 9 now support this work:

Standard 8.47 requires States to establish legislation supporting assistance to victims and families;

Recommended Practice 8.48 calls for aircraft and airport operators to provide timely and effective assistance.

ICAO guidance materials have been created to support States, aircraft operators and airport operators in their implementation.

We have also updated Annex 13 to ensure families receive regular updates on investigation progress.

Additionally, I would also like to note that Annex 9 has important provisions that facilitate the travel of aircraft accident investigators, family members and survivors to and from States of Occurrence and adjacent States.

I would like to reaffirm that ICAO is attuned to the needs of families and victims of aircraft accidents, and stands ready to continue working with States.

In line with 2022 Assembly Resolution A41-14, the Air Transport Committee of ICAO Council approved the Terms of Reference for establishing a Working Group, composed of experts from Facilitation Panel members, observer States, and relevant international organizations.

I am furthermore pleased to announce that ICAO has developed a comprehensive implementation package to assist States in supporting aircraft accident victims and their families. It is now ready for deployment. This resource will help State authorities across aviation, transport, disaster management, foreign affairs, and interior ministries with the implementation of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices and the ICAO Policy on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and their Families.

It will also assist their respective agencies and airport and aircraft operators in the same way. The package's primary goal is to assist States in the development of their National Family Assistance Plan.

Additionally, the ICAO Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and their Families Training Course continues to provide government officials, including civil aviation authority representatives, and aircraft and airport operators, with the competencies needed to develop or refine family assistance legislation, regulations, policies, and plans.

Before concluding today, I also wish to recall that the ICAO Council has established 20 February as the International Day Commemorating Air Crash Victims and their Families.

This commemoration day reminds governments and operators of their duty to provide timely information, care, and resources to accident victims and their loved ones.

Respect for victims and the well-being of their families remain paramount to ICAO. Let this symposium serve as a platform for dialogue and collaboration to strengthen our global approach to family assistance. I am confident that this Symposium will also produce valuable recommendations, which will be considered by ICAO in the subsequent works, particularly in preparation for the 42nd Assembly in September-October 2025.

I look forward to our discussions in the days ahead.

Thank you.