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Given the events of the recent few months and the past weekend, it might seem hard to remember how our purpose in being here today stacks up against a number of crises. Does aviation safety matter much in comparison? Does *aviation* even matter? And if they do, how has the picture changed?

A year ago, we wondered how we could hold the system together and keep up with the unprecedented growth. As we all returned home, we were confronted with a spectacular rise in oil prices that crippled the aviation industry. Airlines around the world failed by the dozen.

Then, during the last few months, the credit crisis erupted, sending shockwaves through the global economy. Oil reached a high of US\$147 in July, only to drop to a low of \$49 in November.

Add to this all war, unrest and the tragic terrorist attacks in Mumbai.

So, to repeat my opening question: Do aviation, and aviation safety, still matter as much as we've always believed, in a world that brings daily threats and shocks?

Yes, they do.

Access to safe, affordable and sustainable air transportation, has changed *and will continue to change* the world. What we do connects the peoples and the markets of the world. When we do it well, it changes history. Aviation creates connections that lead to opportunities. Aviation creates familiarity between individuals that grows into trust, and trust that grows into peace.

That is a fact. Let's talk about some other facts that have not changed in the last few months that represent a foundation we can build on today.

When times are turbulent, it is easy to forget that economics is an *indicator* of human activity. It does not necessarily *drive* human activity.

In July of this year, the chief economist of Goldman Sachs came out with a report that the middle class of the world will grow by 2 billion over the next 20 years. Right now 70 million join the ranks of the middle class every year. By 2027, that rate will accelerate to 90 million a year.

Will that forecast change? I doubt it. Those people have already been born. They have already set their sights. I would not want to bet against them.

Even though I am from a very rich country, like many Americans I know something about the path from poverty. I am the first generation in my family to be born into the middle class. My grandparents were economic refugees who farmed for subsistence while living in a house made from sod. My father was a migrant laborer. Two world wars and a depression did not stop my family in their march out of poverty. I doubt that this economic mess will cause the current generation to give up their dreams. We are not that different.

What is different about this new generation is how badly it *needs* aviation. My father was able to ride between cities on slow-moving freight trains. For the most part, the emerging middle class doesn't even have that option. They live where transportation infrastructure is substandard or nonexistent. They need to be able to get goods to market, they need to move themselves to where the work is.

In addition, this new generation needs stability. Many of these young people live in countries whose borders include fragmented groups that have grown apart through centuries of isolation. The isolation must end if these countries are to survive and if peace to become firmly established. Aviation can connect those people, and that connection must occur.

As these people achieve new wealth, their spending on transportation will increase dramatically. Since 1990, the share of income the average Chinese worker spends on transportation and communications has gone up more than 2,500 percent.

Air transportation remains essential. Its growth is inevitable. It is up to us to keep it safe. What must we do to achieve that?

I have been presented with many safety problems around the world, but I can think of few problems I have seen in aviation safety where the solutions were not already known. Aviation safety is limited not by our ability to understand, but our ability to act. Our ability to act is limited in turn by our ability to speak clearly to each other and to those that govern us about what we do, and what needs to be done.

One of the toughest problems we face is the inability of governments to attract and retain the people it needs to oversee safety. Civil service rules intended to protect the public ultimately put the public at risk, as the safety oversight systems erode from benign neglect. There are many examples of regulators nearly fading almost completely out of existence. A small handful of people are doing what should be done by a hundred.

I have discussed these problems directly with heads of state, and even they feel powerless to act. This is not the type of problem that inspires legislators or politicians.

This is the type of problem that tends to wait for a concentration of tragedies, economic debacles or both.

There *are* solutions. After a string of accidents, Indonesia is pursuing fundamental civil service reform, and the ACSA in Costa Rica solved the problem by setting up a regional organization outside of government constraint. Safety oversight is *not* expensive. But the people who write the checks are not hearing that message.

A problem that plagues all of us is our ability to collect and *protect* the data that keep the system safe. These are the data that warn us of simple errors before they become major tragedies.

We know that the way to keep a system safe is not to focus solely on the one-in-a million tragedies, but instead to pay careful attention to the hundreds of small mistakes that happen every day. Addressing these problems when they are small gives the public higher levels of safety and saves operators money. It is a win-win approach, but getting and keeping that information that feeds it is proving difficult.

Data collection systems are as fragile as they are vital, because they rely on trust. Sometimes these systems are compromised during the pursuit of justice. When an accident occurs, public anger can drive prosecutors and politicians to extreme actions. Recently, we have seen a long list of prosecutions based wholly or partly on protected information. We have even heard a cockpit voice recorder played in parliament shortly after an accident! Justice is just as vital to a society as safety, but we have yet to find a way to communicate our story and find a proper balance.

There has been another threat to these safety reporting systems that is more difficult to grasp. In the U.S., we have had cases of FOQA and ASAP systems being terminated during labor negotiations. There are at least two sides to every story, but I couldn't care less about either. Safety systems do not belong on the bargaining table. Management and labor have to resist using these systems as a bargaining chip both publicly and privately. There is simply no excuse.

Safety oversight is on our agenda today. There is little question that safety management is the way of the future. There is also little question that safety management requires collaboration between labor and regulators. But, there is not a clear consensus about proper balance between enforcement and cooperation.

The simple notion that perfect compliance with rules does not result in perfect safety is lost on politicians, legislators and prosecutors. *They* live in a world where all problems are solved by rules and accountability. *We* live in a world where safety is assured through access to information.

This is a fundamental disconnect we need to work through. This disconnect is magnified during times of political change. In several countries, power has shifted between

conservative and liberal administrations, and in several countries politicians have chosen to make a political issue out of what should be no more than a technical problem. The truth is that there is not a liberal or conservative way to do safety oversight. There are only approaches that work and those that do not. The politics brings additional risk. It simply does not cost anything to depoliticize safety oversight and safety management.

I could list many more challenges but they all come to a similar point. We don't have a lot of technical problems anymore. We have systemic problems that are sensitive and difficult to address. Perhaps today we could start by talking with each other about those difficult issues that lie below the surface.

I have had the honor of traveling the world and meeting a long list of talented and tireless leaders supporting aviation safety. Many of them are here today. I would like to remind you all of one who is not, in the hope that it gives us a bit of inspiration for the rest of the day.

In this same meeting three years ago, a young DG named Maimuna Taal made quite an impression on the participants as she spoke very clearly and plainly about flags of convenience and lack of political will. Some of you may also know that just a few weeks after she left that meeting she encountered an operator that intended to transport people to the Haj, an operator that was owned by some very dangerous and politically connected men. She refused permission. Her "reward" was to spend the next few weeks in prison, and the next two years proving her innocence of a series of hastily constructed charges. She is free now, and working in ICAO. She wishes you all well.

I hope that during this meeting — and more important, after we leave and go back to our work — we can share her resolve, and remember that we can stand tall against the toughest issues.

A whole new generation needs us, they await our services and deserve our commitment. We have an opportunity to help reshape the world, but first we will have to speak clearly, plainly and perhaps repeatedly about the things that matter.