

Promoting regional aviation

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The Cuban capital became the focus of regional and international aviation attention over two days whilst hosting the 88th Latin American Civil Aviation Commission (CLAC) Board Meeting, held in the Tryp Habana Libre Hotel.

With the participation of around one hundred sector representatives, Cuba's commitment and sustained contribution to regional air transport were highlighted during the meeting by CLAC President Carlos Fernando Velásquez, who also noted the significance of the encounter as a precursor to two important events: the 39th Session of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Assembly - a United Nations specialized agency - and CLAC's 22nd Ordinary Assembly, which will address key issues related to the development of Latin American and global aviation.

In regards to the upcoming ICAO event, Cuba is set to present some 30 highly important documents.

Meanwhile, the eight countries nominated to represent the region in the ICAO Council were confirmed during the Board Meeting. The shortlist included Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Colombia, Panama, Uruguay and Ecuador.

This was good news, according to Jorge Félix Castillo de la Paz, director of Air Transport and International Relations at Cuba's Civil Aviation Institute, current second vice president of CLAC, speaking to **Granma International**.

According to the director, another key outcome of the meeting was the approval of a new action plan, which is scheduled to be implemented next year following ratification by the CLAC Assembly. Broadly speaking, he noted that said plan has "a stronger unitary and integrationist focus." Finally he noted that "Latin American air transport has been strengthened following this meeting."

Castillo de la Paz also highlighted the reports by work commissions "which led to important resolutions and recommendations on aspects such as client protection, operational and general aviation security, as well as balancing development with environmental protection."

In this regard, Carlos Fernando Velásquez noted that CLAC has been able to "unite positions and draw up around 30 work documents," which support the "important efforts undertaken by our experts."

"Now more than ever," stated the CLAC President, "we must insist on the need to work together to obtain positive results." He also described the development of the organization's action plan - which is set to be presented before the Assembly and subsequently implemented from January 1, 2017 - as a key step. "This document (...) is an important achievement for the future work," of the Commission, he noted.

REALISTIC GOALS FOR SKY-HIGH CHALLENGES

Carlos Fernando Velásquez, also director general of Guatemalan Civil Engineering, thanked his counterparts from Cuba, Colombia, Argentina and Uruguay for their contributions to the successful functioning of the Commission in their role as vice presidents; the Cuban government for hosting the event; as well as CLAC's 22 member states.

Velásquez ended his speech by calling on those present to make this space "a scene of cooperation and collaboration (...), enhancing the democratic processes and broad-based consensus which have characterized the daily efforts of our regional organization."

Meanwhile, Alfredo Cordero Puig, president of Cuba's Civil Aviation Institute (IACC), highlighted the importance of the encounter at a time when the island "is facing a great challenge, given the 18% increase in passenger arrivals to our country in 2015, a trend which had continued through the first half of the year."

As such, a significant rise is also being seen in air traffic. "We are working fast to develop our airport infrastructure in order to confront this challenge with efficiency and quality," he stated.

According to the IACC President, "the debates and exchanges undertaken here will better prepare us to actively and creatively find the appropriate solutions to the problems currently facing international civil aviation," with efforts geared toward "achieving safe and sustainable development," and committed to balancing sector priorities with those related to environmental protection, he noted.

Meanwhile, Cuban Deputy Minister of Transport, Eduardo Rodríguez Dávila, highlighted that as a founding member of CLAC, Cuba recognizes the importance of the organization, which works to promote "unity, cooperation and concerted efforts" toward the development of civil aviation in the region.

As such he noted that the island has served as a vice president of the CLAC Board - which functions as the governing body of the organization between each Assembly period - on six occasions.

In this regard he noted that efforts have been geared toward developing the sector at a national level in accordance with best practice.

According to Rodríguez Dávila, "In regards to flight information Cuba has a extensive system of routes through which a daily average of 600 planes from different companies fly, and to whom we provide transit control and air navigation services with qualified personnel and the necessary equipment, thus ensuring a high degree of operational safety."

The Deputy Minister also noted that "the sustained development of air transport in Cuba has led to the construction of ten international airports in which over 110 international airlines offering regular commercial and charter flights, operate."

Furthermore, he emphasized the impact of the island's participation in international civil aviation organizations and associations on achievements in this field.

According to Rodríguez Dávila, CLAC is a product of regional consensus across Latin American and the Caribbean, which has "united in its diversity."

He also noted that such integration will increase "once we are able to incorporate more states from the Greater Caribbean."

He went on to state that CLAC represents a space for future projects and the establishment of necessary policies and directives which align civil aviation goals with integration aims.

The praise expressed by the President of the CLAC to Cuba for "organizing a

successful event," attested to the island's commitment to the sustainable development of its civil aviation sector, with goals developed in light of global challenges. Thus, this most recent edition of the meeting undoubtedly served as a new impulse toward fulfilling these commitments.
