

FOREWORD

International Civil Aviation Organization

By Roberto Kobeh Gonzalez, President of the Council of ICAO



Keeping pace with change in a globally harmonized manner is the hallmark of the International Civil Aviation Organization. Its recent implication in Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) is a new and exciting chapter in ICAO's eventful history.

The Convention on International Civil Aviation – also known as the Chicago Convention and ICAO's Charter – was signed in 1944 and established the regulatory framework for the safe and orderly development of international civil aviation around the world. Understandably, it only alludes to UAS in Article 8 when it speaks of «pilotless aircraft». After all, very little was known about UAS at the time and the air transport industry itself was still in its infancy. Still, the wording of Article 8 is remarkably modern in its intention:

No aircraft capable of being flown without a pilot shall be flown without a pilot over the territory of a contracting State without special authorization by that State and in accordance with the terms of such authorization. Each contracting State undertakes to insure that the flight of such aircraft without a pilot in regions open to civil aircraft shall be so controlled as to obviate danger to civil aircraft.

Since those early days, the global aviation community has progressed at an incredible rate. Throughout, ICAO has been the driver for much of the development, more recently with the move toward the implementation of a global and seamless air traffic management (ATM) system. The cornerstone of that effort is the Global ATM Operational Concept which recognizes that both manned and unmanned aerial vehicles will form part of the ATM system of the future.

Within that context, ICAO began addressing the concept of UAS, albeit gradually, through two informal exploratory meetings. These meetings were conclusive in identifying the need for increased ICAO involvement and eventually led to the establishment of the ICAO High Level Study Group on UAS. The terms of Reference of the Study Group, as approved by the ICAO Air Navigation Commission, are to assist the Organization's Secretariat in coordinating the development of ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPS), procedures and guidance material for the UAS sector. The intent is to support a safe, secure and efficient integration of UAS into non-segregated airspace and aerodromes.

The Study Group will henceforth be the focal point and clearinghouse for all ICAO work on UAS. The creation of the Group generated a great deal of enthusiasm in the aviation community and a number of States as well as international organizations related to aviation have nominated representatives to take part in the Group's activities.

The expectation is that the development and eventually adoption of ICAO provisions will facilitate the operation of UAS in international and high seas airspace and respond to the pressing need of States for regulatory guidance in

the matter. With the growing importance and enormous potential of UAS, ICAO SARPs can provide that minimum set of technical and operational requirements that can contribute to building confidence and trust by operators and regulators alike when such vehicles cross international boundaries.

Since its founding, ICAO has been committed to the safe, secure, efficient and sustainable development of air transport. Unmanned Aircraft Systems is another dimension of this ever-widening mandate.

