



Joint ECAC-ICAO EUR/NAT regional workshop on assistance to aircraft accident victims and their families



Milan, February 20th 2023

I am speaking on behalf of Pilar Vera Palmés, President of Air Crash Victims' Families' Federation International, ACVFFI. She was unable to attend the Workshop for personal reasons. I will explain what the Victims International Federation does and what it works for internationally.

Pilar Vera thanks the ICAO Euro/NAT Regional, the European Civil Aviation Conference, and the Italian Civil Aviation Authority for their commitment to hold this first Workshop today, February 20th, 2023, which is also the second year of the INTERNATIONAL DAY OF AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES, approved and promoted by the ICAO.

Pilar Vera Palmés founded the International Federation of Air-crash Victims and their Families in Madrid, with the participation of the JK5022 Flight Association, which she also chairs, the German Association of Flight AF447, and the Pakistani Association of Flight ED202. These associations were created after the accidents occurred in 2008, 2009, and 2010.

On the slide, you can see the current composition of Associations and individual victims.

We all share the search for TRUTH, JUSTICE, REPARATION, AND MEMORY. We respect what each Association does in their country. We exchange knowledge, information, support, and experience.

Until 2001, ICAO had no regulation on assistance to air-crash victims and their families. After discussion during the ECAC Meeting in Tallinn (Estonia) in 2000, Circular 285 was approved and released by the ICAO Secretary General. This was the very first step.

In 2010, Pilar Vera met Hans Ephraimson, President of the North American Association of Victims. Both achieved the involvement of Spain, the United States, and the ICAO to update Circular 285. The purpose was to achieve a more relevant and committed Document.

On March 1st, 2013, Pilar Vera attended the ICAO Council for the first time in history. They approved the Policy on Assistance to Victims of Aviation Accidents and their Families, Doc 9998, later endorsed by the 38th Assembly.

Hans Ephraimson passed away in October 2013 and Pilar Vera continued his international efforts by herself. She achieved, among other things, Doc 9998 to be included in ICAO Annex 9, which became a standard in November 2022.

In Madrid, 2015, she established , the International Federation of Victims, bringing a unified voice of victims and their families to international organizations.

A relevant milestone for the entailed effort was to get ICAO to promote an event on family assistance, in which victims, families, States, International Organizations, insurers, lawyers, and professionals could discuss about this important issue. It was necessary leave the fear of talking to the victims behind and it would only be achieved constructively with an official event.

Since the approval of Doc 9998 in 2013 and until 2020, ICAO did not promote or participate on any exclusive event on assistance. Getting to schedule a Symposium in between the ICAO triennial events was a milestone.

It was held in Spain, the official headquarters of the International Federation of Victim, specifically in the island of Gran Canaria, home of more than 80 people lost their lives during the tragedy of Flight JK5022, which crashed on August 20, 2008, at the Madrid-Barajas Airport.

The 41st Assembly approved the Council's Working Paper 21, regarding the 30 Recommendations issued by the first Symposium on Assistance to Aviation Victims and Their Families.

This gave the Federation hope that the Recommendations would be followed by all stakeholders in international civil aviation and by ICAO.

Now, we are finally seeing results.

We are glad that the ICAO EUR/NAT Regional was the first to hold a Workshop on ICAO Policy on Victim Assistance, helped by ECAC and ENAC.

After this Workshop, we hope all other participating States and Organizations to commit to the implementation of Doc 9998 in their internal regulations.

The 30 Recommendations address the issues which the International Federation of Victims recognized from their experience and suffering from the loss of their loved ones. We hope all agents involved in aviation; ICAO, International Organizations, Member States, etc., take this into account.

This Workshop fulfills one of the Recommendations; to promote the implementation of Doc 9998. Workshops of other ICAO Regional Offices will be held later.

We believe these workshops together with the ICAO Training Course, promoted by the Federation, are ways will help States and Organizations understand and implement the ICAO Policy on Victim Assistance.

Media could use an information guide that's professional, respectful, and transparent.

Promoting Legal Forum on the best practices of insurers which addresses issues such as changes in the Montreal Convention to balance the interests of insurers and families of victims.

Strengthen the independence of the accident investigation authorities. Ensuring official accident reports are rigorous, professional, and effective to correct the causes of air disasters.

Involvement of States, International Organizations, and agents of the aviation sector in assistance to victims and families. The results of the 2021 audits were disappointing after 8 years of the release of Doc 9998.

Establish a "home" at ICAO for the policy on assistance to victims and families. It is currently in the facilitation section. However, we hope ICAO creates a specialized section specialized in the issues which the federation promotes, such as the training course, the international day, the symposium, etc. TO this day, despite being approved in Assemblies, they are not subsequently followed up on as other ICAO matters.

Promote collaboration and support between the Member States and the International Federation of Victims. Having a unique victims "voice" in international organizations is a historic opportunity. Without support, the federation will not be able to maintain itself, they only have the will of their members. The International Federation of Victims is atypical, it has no partners to support it financially. The people we help do not even know about us. However, when they suffer a plane accident, we ensure they are treated with dignity, efficiency, and empathy.

Do it now...sometimes "later" means "never".

This African proverb shows the way of things of in the International Federation and what we want the States and agents involved in international aviation to do.

It is not only about the future victims, any of us, who fly airplanes as passengers or crewmembers, could be involved in an air disaster. It is also for all the victims of plane crashes who have died anywhere in the world, and who are somewhere... always in our hearts.

Today, February 20, we remember in a special way all the victims who died in an aircraft accident and their families. Sharing knowledge will surely help those who unfortunately suffer a plane crash in the future.

Thank you so much.