



WORKING PAPER

ASSEMBLY — 42ND SESSION

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 12: Facilitation Programmes

SYMPOSIUM ON ASSISTANCE TO AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT VICTIMS AND THEIR FAMILIES

(Presented by Air Crash Victims Families' Federation International (ACVFFI))

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, Assembly Resolution A39-27: *Assistance to victims of aviation accidents and their families* urged Member States to reaffirm their commitment to providing assistance to victims of civil aviation accidents and their families. This commitment was further reinforced by Assembly Resolutions A40-16: *Consolidated statement of continuing ICAO policies related to facilitation* and A41-14: *Assistance to victims of aviation accidents and their families*. To support Member States in implementing such measures, the First Symposium on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families (AAAVF 2021) was held in Gran Canaria, Spain, in December 2021. The symposium produced a list of 30 crucial recommendations for the consideration of all relevant stakeholders involved in post-accident response. In 2024, the Second Symposium (AAAVF 2024) was held in Haarlem, Netherlands, with a format and content that differed significantly from the first, resulting in less tangible outcomes and revealing the need for a standardized protocol to ensure appropriate structure, inclusive content and concrete results. This working paper proposes recommendations and guidelines for the organization of future symposia to ensure the effective participation of victims and their families, as well as all relevant actors involved in post-accident assistance. The Third Symposium is scheduled for 2027 and should preferably take place on a different continent, as the first two editions were both held in Europe.

Action: The Assembly is invited to:

- recognize the contributions of AAAVF 2021 and 2024 to strengthening the victim-centered approach in international civil aviation;
- take note of the need to establish a standardized and formal mechanism for future editions;
- request the Council to incorporate a structured procedure to ensure that each AAAVF symposium concludes with outcomes validated by participants and presented to the Council;
- recommend that the planning of future symposia be carried out in consultation with key stakeholders; and
- urge the Council to consider the outcomes of future AAAVF symposia as institutional reference inputs that inform and enhance ICAO's triennial work programme.

<i>Strategic Goals:</i>	This working paper relates to Strategic Goal <i>Aviation Delivers Seamless, Accessible and Reliable Mobility for All</i> .
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¹ English and Spanish version provided by Air Crash Victims Families' Federation International (ACVFFI).

<i>Financial implications:</i>	To be met from the resources of the ICAO Secretariat or through contributions under the “No Country Left Behind” initiative.
<i>References:</i>	Doc 9998, <i>ICAO Policy on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families</i> Doc 9973, <i>Manual on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families</i> Report of the AAASF 2021 Symposium Assembly Resolutions A39-27, A40-16, and A41-14

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Symposium on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families (AAASF 2021), held in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, from 1 to 3 December 2021, emphasized in its conclusions about the importance of providing appropriate assistance to victims from the earliest phases of an accident.

1.2 This first symposium, organized by ICAO with the support of the Government of Spain, the Canary Islands and Air Crash Victims Families’ Federation International (ACVFFI), concluded with 30 concrete recommendations, which were approved by the ICAO Council in February 2022. These recommendations provided a clear roadmap for States and stakeholders involved in the implementation of Doc 9998, *ICAO Policy on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families* and Doc 9973, *Manual on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families*.

1.3 The Second Symposium (AAASF 2024), organized by ICAO with the support of the Government of the Netherlands in Haarlem, concluded without formal outcomes, although it featured insightful discussions on the current state of victim and family assistance.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The recommendations from AAASF 2021 helped identify concrete measures to strengthen assistance to victims and their families. These covered, among other topics, regulatory harmonization, the development of national assistance plans, family communication, respect for personal belongings, cooperation with victim organizations, and the need to promote a victim-centered culture within civil aviation.

2.2 The success of AAASF 2021 stemmed not only from the quality of its presentations but also from the fact that it concluded with clear institutional outcomes: a formal set of recommendations submitted to the Council, which enabled follow-up by working groups, panels, and regional offices.

2.3 In contrast, AAASF 2024, despite featuring technically strong sessions, did not result in a formal set of recommendations or proposals. The lack of a structured process to collect and validate outcomes hindered continuity and follow-up by the relevant stakeholders, revealing an opportunity for improvement.

2.4 Moreover, while the symposium had notable participation from some organizations and States, it did not systematically ensure the early involvement in planning of key actors for an event of this sensitivity, such as the Air Crash Victims’ Families’ Federation International (ACVFFI), which limited the content, outcomes and representativeness of the event.

2.5 Similarly, Recommendation 30 of the AAASF 2021 Symposium, as included in working paper A41-WP/21, *Assistance to aircraft accident victims and their families* submitted by the Council to the 41st Assembly, recommended the continuation of AAASF through future symposia organized in a similar manner.

3. ANALYSIS

3.1 It is of utmost importance that States be prepared to provide appropriate assistance to aircraft accident victims and their families in the event of an aviation accident, as ACVFFI reiterated in working papers A40-WP/147, *Assistance to air accident victims in the airports emergency plans* and A41-WP/14, *Report on the updated long-term traffic forecasts with post-covid-19 pandemic scenarios*. ICAO initiatives over the past triennium, largely derived from the conclusions and recommendations of AAASF 2021, have been very well received by stakeholders in civil aviation.

3.2 The differing experiences of the two symposia convened by ICAO highlight the need to establish a structured methodology for organizing future editions of the AAASF Symposium that ensures:

- the early and formal involvement in planning of all directly concerned parties, particularly ACVFFI as the unified voice of victims within ICAO. Collaborative planning, including preparatory working sessions to build consensus. The designation of a team responsible for synthesizing the topics addressed and formulating a draft set of conclusions and recommendations, in collaboration with ACVFFI as the recognized voice of victims and families at ICAO;
- a final validation process during the symposium that allows participants to formally agree on such conclusions and recommendations;
- the submission of outcomes to the Council for review, follow-up and potential inclusion in ICAO triennial work programme;
- inclusive participation by all stakeholders referenced in Doc 9998, ensuring proper representation across all relevant sectors; and
- geographic rotation of the third and subsequent symposia across continents.

3.3 This approach will ensure that future AAASF symposia not only foster reflection and dialogue but also result in concrete actions aligned with Assembly Resolutions and the expectations of States and affected families.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 The Assembly is invited to recognize that Symposia on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims Families' constitute an essential tool for advancing the implementation of Doc 9998, *ICAO Policy on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families* and the associated Doc 9973, *Manual on Assistance to Aircraft Accident Victims and Their Families*, while also strengthening cooperation among States, operators, international organizations, and victims' associations.

4.2 It is noted that the first symposium (AAASF 2021) produced a set of 30 concrete recommendations, approved by the Council, which enabled the development of formal and actionable follow-up initiatives. In contrast, the second symposium (AAASF 2024), although valuable from a technical standpoint, did not result in formal conclusions or recommendations, which limited its institutional impact and follow-up within the ICAO structure.

4.3 Therefore, the Assembly is invited to:

4.3.1 Recognize the importance of ensuring that all future AAASF Symposia include formal mechanisms that lead to the development of conclusions, recommendations, and/or institutional statements

that may be submitted to the Council for consideration and potential incorporation into the Organization's triennial strategic plans;

4.3.2 Request the Council to develop a structured protocol for the organization of future AAASF Symposia, which includes:

- a) the early involvement of all relevant stakeholders identified in Doc 9973, including States, civil aviation authorities, operators, forensic entities, insurance providers, health professionals, legal assistance bodies, airports, and especially victims' organizations;
- b) the formal inclusion of ACVFFI, as an ICAO-recognized entity, in the planning, execution, and reporting of the events; and
- c) a results drafting and validation process at the close of each symposium, to ensure the adoption of formal recommendations or conclusions;

4.3.3 Reaffirm that this approach is consistent with the spirit of Assembly Resolutions A39-27, A40-16, and A41-14, which call on States to establish regulatory, institutional and operational frameworks to ensure timely, respectful and effective assistance to air accident victims and their families.

4.4 This approach will ensure that AAASF Symposia continue to serve as highly useful, inclusive forums that generate tangible results, strengthen the implementation of Doc 9998 by Member States, and reinforce international cooperation and the aviation community's commitment to victim assistance.

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