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What are the shared goals of the stakeholders in the aviation industry?

The goals, at this point in time, for the industry and its stakeholders in my opinion, are divided into two big sections: the first is certainly how to deal with the current crisis, the pandemic, and the second one is how the industry needs to be in the recovery phase. For the short term, the biggest problem we are facing today is not only the pandemic by itself, but how many governments are looking at aviation as a culprit in the spread of the pandemic. The way those governments have dealt with the pandemic shows fear of blame and not leadership. In my view, the utmost objective for the short term should be to convince governments, first that the aviation industry is not a spreader of the virus, of course, while adhering to all biosafety and protective measures that are in use today, and second that closing borders is not going to mitigate the exposure to the virus, and this has already been proven in many instances as there are countries that are closed but still the virus is spreading like wildfire. Governments should learn from those facts that it is not traveling that is spreading the virus but lack of responsible behavior from many individuals in not doing the right things. Numbers that underline this fact are very clear: 97.1% of the infections are locally generated, 2.9% were incoming travelers who had the virus before even traveling, and only 0.0000004% of the infections happened during the air transport phases including even the time when the virus was not identified, and no protective measures were taken neither by the crews nor by the travelers. Hence, we need to convince governments as an industry, as stakeholders of the industry that the right way to deal with this crisis is not by closing borders, is not by quarantine but it is by implementing smart measures that will not actually stop travel but that will make travel from the biosafety angle a safer way of transport. This should be the primary objective.

The question I ask myself is how the industry and the stakeholders will talk or be able to convince governments, when many of them ignored the guidelines of ICAO, WHO and IATA, even after those guidelines were welcomed and sought after by those same governments. Look at what is happening today with the UK after the discovery of the new strain: governments resorted back to their comfort zone of employing unilateral measures, no harmony, no discussions even no scientifically driven measures. Going back to the basics, it needs to be stressed that those measures taken today have proven to be not good enough to mitigate the spread. So, the answer is not more closure, the answer is openness with intelligence, that is “smart openness” rather than just fall back on isolation and for some politicians to try to convince their constituencies that they are doing the right thing, driven by the fear of blame rather than driven by leadership. This is where many governments have failed miserably in dealing with this pandemic. Now we can see the light at the end of the tunnel, the vaccines are there, and we know that we have started with the help of the vaccines the way out of the tunnel. But the question is going to be: “how many airlines, restaurants, hotels, stakeholders, people are going to be left out in the tunnel?” Because by the time we exit the tunnel we will be a smaller industry in terms of connectivity, which will have serious repercussions on the recovery of the economy. We need to reach that light at the end of the tunnel with the maximum possible strength rather than what they are seeing today which is causing the damage for the industry for no good reason.

On the second shared goal, we need leadership from the industry and from other stakeholders. More particularly ICAO in conjunction with WHO, and in relation with national governments, should make visible the information of the biosafety of the individuals who are going to travel together. First, we need to convince travelers that the aviation system is safe. In order to do that there is several protective measures, the vaccine and other measures that need to be taken and implemented. One of them is of course the PCR test, especially the rapid ones. But, in order for the governments to identify that this individual/traveler has all the prerequisites, and is not a transmitter of the virus, they need a tool. IATA has launched a great initiative, which is the Travel Pass. This Pass harnesses

technology and makes it visible to the concerned parties. That helps in restoring trust in the system and helps the industry recover faster by bringing all the travelers' information, including the vaccine certificate provided of course that the Pass meets the adoption by governments and other stakeholders to the concerned parties. Technology has provided all peoples of the world with alternatives for physical interaction. Now it can provide more tools for the traveling experience. If the right strings are pulled, if the governments approve using technology for a better travel experience, irrespective of whether it is called IATA pass or ICAO or individual airlines' passes, and with WHO adopting the health certificate with this "electronic travel pass" where all the required health information are on the app which proves that the traveler meets all the prerequisites for safe travel, traveling will become easier. That will add value to the recovery. We can even push the envelope a bit further and we can imagine this app with biometrics for the use of governments' agencies, immigration, security and so on, all the points that cause burden and delays to the traveler. We are used to having crowding at the immigration offices, at the customs offices, at the security points. All those points can take advantage of pushing the use of technology further. Technology can provide a smoother way of handling the passenger to ensure not only that people are bio-safe, but they are also secure, that they have their valid documents, and the customs clearance can be done in an easier way. And if governments approve that pass, imagine what will happen to the traveler experience for all the travelers of the world; that will help not only on a short term for recovery, but also in the long term to create that utopian situation we have always strived to achieve IATA's fast travel initiative. That can be done. Technology is there and it has proven it is reliable and it can do that with acceptance by the governments of all of those components. One can travel today with the boarding pass on the phone, airline security and immigration accept that. Why not accepting that my visas are on the phone, my passport is on my phone, or that my ID on the phone.

To summarize, short terms goals are to convince governments that quarantine and closing borders are not the right approaches. Opening borders and adherence to biosafety measures (PCRs, rapid tests) are the right approaches. These measures should be implemented before departure or after arrival but without quarantine. This is the short-term objective that we need to do today. The medium-term goal is to make sure that technology is harnessed with the acceptance by governments to recognize that travelers are bio-safe, secure and have all the prerequisites for a smooth travel experience.

So, are there any risks in terms of competition dynamics? How will level playing field evolve in the future? Could competition possibly under- mine any future collaboration among the various stakeholders?

I believe that, at the moment, the whole industry is in a survival mode, so no one is looking at who is taking what from his government. I believe that this is the role of governments. They need to step in and provide safety nets for the airlines in what they represent, that is a major contribution to the economic resilience. Therefore, if US and EU airlines are receiving support from their governments, that's great, because I am calling upon the Arab governments to do the same. Governments are required to step in during times of crises and provide safety nets in order for the economy to recover faster. Without that safety net imagine what would be the case for jobs and how the recovery will happen. What the recovery will be like when we get out of this situation if the main foundations of the players, stakeholders, airlines, hotels, restaurants and so on have collapsed during the crisis. So, I would not think that what is happening with the support is bad. US airlines are receiving something like 30% + of their perceived losses. Airlines in Europe received more than 35% of their perceived losses, while airlines in the Arab region received only 11% of their perceived losses. I am encouraging governments in the Arab world to support the airlines in similar magnitudes.

Otherwise, it will be very difficult for the airlines to go back to their normal pre-crisis operations very quickly. Because of the competitive nature of the business, there have always been voices against subsidies claiming, "I cannot compete against airlines that get subsidies". These claims will be heard again when the industry gets back to normal, but in the current situation, any cent spent on airlines and any other stakeholders such as airports and so on in support of the resilience of the aviation industry and its satellite businesses is wanted and needed.

Who should assume a leadership role in industry decision-making? What is expected of leaders these days but also in the medium and longer term?

IATA and ICAO should take the lead jointly with WHO in order to provide the needed power to convince governments that there is a better way of dealing with the problem. I am not talking about appealing to governments but about a joint strategy built upon the main requisites of the stakeholders for a quick recovery. IATA representing the airlines which are the connectors and the backbone for the other related industries; ICAO representing the infrastructure and the entry points; the governments in terms of oversight over the airlines, airports, airspace and so on; and the WHO for being the party representing the governments in relation to the required health measures and measures in general to deal with the pandemic. So, the leadership should be a combined leadership that is required not only to produce guidelines which are of course important especially the harmonized guidelines provided by ICAO in conjunction with IATA and WHO - but also to reach out to governments individually and to talk to them and present action plans for dealing with access to their countries and dealing with the measures required by most governments in order to ensure travel with the maximum biosafety. I will present an example of what we have done jointly with the Arab Civil Aviation Organization, IATA and ICAO regional offices, and the Arab Tourism Organization, to give an idea of how this can be implemented: we have taken ICAO CART guidelines and discussed them in a joint Forum with the four organizations and developed an action plan which was taken to the Arab Council of Transport Ministers for approval and it was approved. We also went to the Arab League which is the custodian of all the joint Arab efforts, and it was approved. The implementation tool for these measures will be through a joint meeting that will bring together the executive offices of the three ministerial councils that made the harmonization of these measures, the CART measures basically, possible for implementation. More specifically, the meeting will bring together the Arab ministers of Health, Arab Ministers of Transport and Arab Ministers of Tourism in order to adopt these measures and then to carry on with the individual governments for implementation. This is a model that can be done elsewhere in the world.

Can this collaboration on COVID-19 crisis serve as a model of collaboration between the different stakeholders for any future crises aviation will face?

Absolutely. This does not mean that collaboration does not exist today. There is a great deal of collaboration between IATA and ICAO on the environmental front and between A4E, EUROCONTROL, and the EU on infrastructure development and air traffic management flows. Those examples of collaboration have led to better results not only for airlines and for airports, but also to the sustainable development in all the countries of the world. So that model of collaboration is already here, what it needs to have is more passion in doing things, more decisiveness to go beyond the conventional. Unfortunately, some members of governmental organizations raise too many hurdles by invoking the principle of sovereignty. I do understand it, but most of the times it comes into play to stop things from happening rather than to make them happen. The sovereignty concept should be used to take from best practices and best work that is done globally and

implement them nationally. But what is happening most of the time is that sovereignty is like a comfort zone where countries or governments step back and say, “we will not do what is recommended because we are sovereign!”. They invoke sovereignty every time they want to stop something from happening. This is where going beyond the conventional is important. And to use an example: Why is it that the EU was the very successful in dealing with this crisis in comparison with other parts of the world? Some people may say China, but Chinese dynamics are totally different than the western dynamics in relation to how they implement measures internally, how they enforce adherence. That cannot happen in the Western world. But if we compare two western powers, the EU with the US, the EU is much more successful in handling this crisis and this is obvious by the number of infections. The secret in that success is that the EU transcends political boundaries in Europe and has the power to be listened to by national governments in that region.

ICAO in its meeting back in September discussed main collaboration and innovation and now they are pushing for a closer collaboration with the industry, to establish a link between ICAO which represents the governments with the industry, that is IATA, ACI and similar organisations to work on innovation. How do you see a closer collaboration between governments, one part of aviation chain with the industry, that is all stakeholders? How important is such a collaboration in order for the industry to be successful and efficient?

I see such collaboration already happening today and it has been happening for some time now. ICAO as an inclusive organization, reaching out to other stakeholders, was never a problem. ICAO should be commended for being open to other stakeholders’ opinions, ideas, and inputs. Salvatore Sciacchitano, ICAO Council President, has come from an “experiment” of a very deep collaboration within the EU, so Salvatore has come to ICAO with a legacy of the importance of collaboration, so he understands very well how important it is to go beyond the conventional to deepen that spirit of cooperation between stakeholders.

But there is a caveat on deliverables of cooperation. Cooperation is great if it leads to action on the ground. To give an example: CART I and CART II were excellent initiatives that led to harmonious measures that can be implemented by governments. Unfortunately, it stopped there, and I am not blaming ICAO for that. Guidelines are guidelines but aviation people and governments are not the drivers. If you do something good in the time of crisis then it serves as a model for what can be done in normal times because that will add value to whatever you are doing. If you are succeeding in a crisis then you will succeed with high marks in a normal situation. ICAO succeeded in bringing together different parties to issue the guidelines. But these guidelines, despite the best efforts of ICAO which created dashboards to show who is implementing and who is not - have not been as successful as expected. I believe that many of the individual stakeholders in ICAO did not play their role in order to make these guidelines implemented globally. It is not ICAO nor IATA to blame, what needs to be done is to actually change the attitude towards what is called “guidelines” from being only “guidelines”, that is recommendations that we can forget about and do whatever we want, to something more concrete: to understand that guidelines need to be actually implemented. Good things are measured by what happens on the ground, and not by good intentions. Seeing what has happened this last year with the UK has made me believe even more that no matter what great guidelines one does, no matter what great recommendations one does, no matter how deep the collaboration is, the test is what is implemented on the ground at the end. Therefore, on the theoretical academic level, what we have done collaboratively is great, but on the ground, airlines and stakeholders are still suffering and many governments are doing what they want to do, individually, that is making life even more difficult for aviation. I hope the lesson to be learnt from this crisis is that we can collaborate and talk in principle as much as we want but the achievement is

not there. The actual achievement is how much of that is going to transpire to the actual stakeholders on the ground. And this is what matters: what our people are going to feel that what we have done together has made a difference, a positive difference.

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