

## **Opening Ceremony**

### **Speech of Mr. Abdul Wahab Teffaha – Secretary General 48<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting Arab Air Carriers Organization**

**His Royal Highness Prince Khalid Al-Faisal,  
His Excellency Chairman of the General Assembly Engineer Saleh Al-Jasser,  
His Excellency Dr. Mohammed bin Ibrahim Al-Tuwaijri, Assistant Secretary  
General of the Arab League  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We meet today for the fifth time at the level of the General Assembly on this blessed land, in the Bride of the Red Sea – Jeddah. What distinguishes this event today is that it coincides with the seventieth anniversary of Saudi Arabian Airlines, which was founded by the late King Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, may God bless his soul, which launched the journey of the kingdom in the air transport sector and its pursuant pivotal role in the Arab and international arenas. I would like therefore to extend my congratulations to Saudia on this milestone in its long journey which, God willing, will continue to be filled with achievements.

We also celebrate this year the fiftieth anniversary of AACO which was founded by invitation of the League of Arab States and under its umbrella. Upon the decision of the Arab Transport Ministers to establish an association for Arab airlines, thirteen Arab airlines, including Saudia of course, met in Cairo at the Headquarters of the League of Arab States to sign the Articles of Association of AACO. Were it not for the initiative of the founding pioneers we wouldn't have been able to take pride in being a tool for Arab cooperation between airlines, being key economic institutions in development, job creation, and in providing added value to the Arab countries by linking them with each other and with others. As time went by, this role evolved with the development of technology and infrastructure in the Arab world which allowed Arab airlines to link the corners of the world as well as play their natural role of air transport to, from and within the Arab world.

From a number of passengers in the Arab world which did not exceed 3 millions in 1965, to 185 million passengers in 2015; and from 13 airlines which owned 86 aircraft in 1965, to 31 airlines operating 1,200 aircraft among the most advanced in the world; and from

a total number of passengers on-board the 13 airlines of 2.2 million passengers in 1965, to 195 million passengers in 2015; and from Arab airports which dealt with 3 million passengers in 1965, to global hubs which dealt with 325 million passengers in 2015.

**Your Highness,  
Your excellencies,**

This success journey did not only result from natural growth of air transport in the Arab world, it also resulted from the expansion of the role of Arab airlines on the global air transport landscape. From a time when we constituted less than 1% of the global traffic in 1965, we now represent 6% of that traffic. The reasons for this growth are not only limited to operations; however those reasons are many and the most important ones are:

1. Arab governments' embrace of the positive role of air transport as an economic catalyst. This role has incentivized those governments to provide an appropriate operational environment through avoiding burdening the air transport sector with excessive taxation which is taking place in some other areas in the world.
2. The second reason is the central geographic location of the Arab world which allowed Arab airlines to play their role on the global air transport map, while at the same time optimizing their operations to and from the region.
3. The third reason is the value product in terms of price and service level which distinguishes Arab airlines and is an attraction point for the customer.
4. The fourth reason is open sky policies which allow market development and promote healthy competition between airlines, consequently provide value to the customer, to economic development, and to airlines as well.

Because of these reasons and others, the Arab world and its airlines have been the fastest growing during the past two decades. This success journey can only continue with the co-existence of its facilitating factors; the most important factor being the governments' embrace of the positive role of air transport.

On AACO's level, we have aspired to provide added value to our members and to the air transport industry as a whole. AACO's role did not stop at being a framework for coordination among its members. It rather went beyond this role to provide economic value through several joint projects among its member airlines, raising awareness on industry issues in order to deal with those issues for the benefit of all stakeholders, and finally to use data and scientific research to forecast the development of the air transport industry using the most comprehensive statistical database on the Arab air transport sector.

I would like in conclusion to reiterate my thanks to Your Highness for honoring us with opening this General Assembly, and reiterate my congratulations to Saudia in its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary while at the same time thanking His Excellency Engineer Saleh Al-Jasser and his team for the authentic hospitality that we enjoy whenever we come to this blessed land. And to thank H.E Dr. Al-Tuwaijri for recognizing AACO as an important tool for Arab cooperation.

**Abdul Wahab Teffaha**  
**Secretary General**