

THE STEVENS HOTEL: GENESIS OF ICAO

by Albert Pelsser

The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), at the time of its founding, became the only UN body to have its headquarters in Montreal, Canada. This article provides an overview of the main developments in civil aviation prior to the Chicago Conference and some insights on the Stevens Hotel at Chicago where the establishment of ICAO was decided. Moreover, the term *forerunner* used by the UN collectors is applied herewith and will refer, for ICAO collectors, to stamps related to inter-governmental bodies dealing with international civil aviation in existence prior to the ICAO's birth in 1944.

EARLY ACHIEVEMENTS

Although the art of flying was dreamed of by man as far back as the legendary Icarus and the brilliant scholar Da Vinci, it is particularly significant that men started flying only early in the 20th century.

Prior to World War I, aviation had attracted mainly the attention of technical inventors in many countries. However, jurists wanted to keep pace with the inventors and several international air conferences, sponsored by various European governments, were held between 1889 and 1913.

A first attempt to draft a general convention on civil aviation matters was made in 1910 at the European conference in Paris. France had to take the lead in the task of securing an international air law code, due to the landing of a number of German balloons on French soil; however, the conference failed to reach an agreement on some of the articles of the text.

Interest in powered airplanes began to increase when governments started to appreciate their value for military purposes; World War I greatly stimulated technical innovations and improvements, and the airplane was used during war as an instrument of destruction. The large number of military aircrafts and pilots, which were available for civilian use after the end of the war, marked the beginnings of the first international commercial air services that were established early in 1919. A growing necessity for international cooperation in the field of aviation followed very quickly.

The development of international civil aviation between the two wars was due more to political than technical and economic considerations. The factor of *national prestige* had undoubtedly exercised a great influence, so that no nation could afford to neglect the air and the possibilities offered. Furthermore, in the 1920s and

1930s, the European Governments realized the potential of international air transport in linking their overseas colonies to the home country. Airlines of the United States were initially dependent upon mail contracts for their survival, whereas in Europe, companies were largely subsidized by their governments for the development of passenger transport. By the mid-1930s, passenger traffic on the commercial airlines had grown substantially, replacing mail contracts as the primary source of revenues.

INTERNATIONAL CONTROL AND COOPERATION

The solid achievements of the 1910 Paris Conference were inherited in 1919 by the Aeronautical Commission of the Paris Peace Conference (see Figure 1), which provided the foundation for a permanent body known as the International Commission for Air Navigation (ICAN). Established on 13 October 1919, ICAN entered into effect

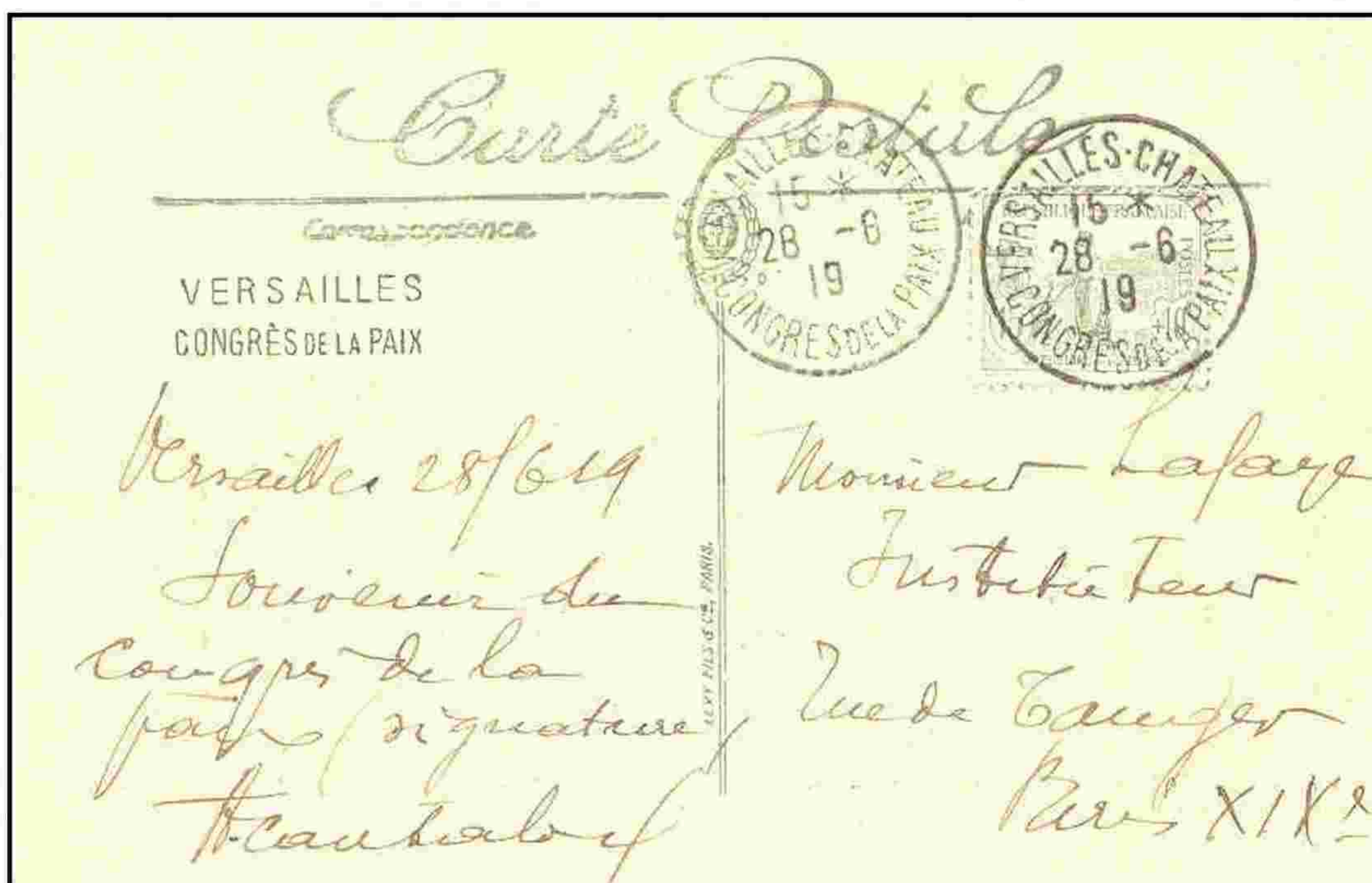


Figure 1: Postcard of the Trianon Palace, Versailles, postmarked "Congrès de la paix."

on 11 July 1922, after a majority of the signatory states had ratified the Paris Convention relating to the Regulation of Aerial Navigation. The reporter-general of the commission was Captain Albert Roper, a young aviation officer, who was appointed as ICAN Secretary General at the first session of the Commission in July 1922; Mr. Roper would become PICA's Secretary General in 1945. The seat of ICAN was Paris. The ICAN was the first experiment of international cooperation in the technical field of air navigation through a permanent international agency. It is interesting to note that two of the largest states of leading importance to postwar civil aviation, the USSR and the United States, never ratified the Paris Convention.

A similar convention had been prepared in Havana in January 1928 under the auspices of the Sixth Pan American Conference; Cuba issued a set of ten stamps to commemorate this conference (see Figure 2). The Havana Convention on Commercial Aviation, signed on 20 February 1928, did not contain provisions for a continuing administrative machinery. States ratifying the Convention would allow mutual freedom of passage in the air; no attempt was made to develop uniform technical standards. At the Pan American Conference at Lima in 1937 (see Figure 3), plans were

made for creating a Permanent American Aeronautical Commission, but its organization never materialized.



Figure 2: Cuba, Scott #289, Sixth Pan-American Conference.

At the start of the 20th century, recognizing the pioneering flights of pilots, the proliferation of aeronautical competitions and increasingly rapid technological advances, an international aeronautical conference was convened in Paris on 12 October 1905; the *Fédération Aéronautique Internationale* (FAI) was founded thereon on 14 October 1905 as the world governing body for air sports. Its aims are to encourage progress and mutual assistance in aviation and the facilitation of international flight, through private



Figure 3: Peru, Scott #C45-C48, Inter-American Conference on Aviation (Lima).



Figure 4: Egypt, Scott #172-176, International Civil Aviation Congress (Cairo).

aviation, aviation sport and air touring; it is also the official repository of historic records in aviation. The 33rd General Conference of the FAI was held from 20 to 23 December 1933 at the Palace Hotel, Héliopolis, Cairo, and was honoured by a set of five stamps. A mistaken postmark shows the date of 20 DEC 32 (see Figure 4).

To commemorate the 25th anniversary of the first sustained and controlled human flight in a self-propelled heavier-than-air craft by the Wright brothers, President Coolidge of the USA called the International Civil Aeronautics Conference in Washington, D.C. from 12 to 14 December 1928. The purpose of the Conference was to consider the strides made throughout the world in the science and practice of civil aeronautics since the first power-driven flight, and to discuss ways and means of further developing it for the benefit of mankind. The first day cover of Figure 5 was addressed to dealer A.C. Roessler, who popularized during this period first-day covers by his creative publishing and helped to establish that market as we know it today.

With the growing needs arising from the rapid development of international postal relations, the Universal

Postal Union (UPU) was established on 7 July 1875 to promote the organization and improvement of world postal services in a spirit of international cooperation. At the Stockholm Congress of UPU in 1924, the possibility of using the airplane for the transportation of mail gained momentum and airmail transport was considered as an "extraordinary" ground service; the determination of the rates were left to the administrations using it. Although the latter convention had been in existence for only one year, a need for modification was recognized to consider unifying airmail surtaxes demanded of the public and to simplify the method of remunerating the air transport companies. As the signatory governments were bound by a five-year agreement during which time amendments to the convention were practically impossible to obtain, the Post Office of the USSR took the step in March 1927 of formally proposing a special Air Mail Conference of postal administrations of the UPU. This Conference met at The Hague, The Netherlands, from 1 to 10 September 1927, at the initiative of the USSR which issued a set of two stamps on this occasion (see Figure 6).

Before World War II, no genuine agreements of a world-wide scope had been reached to face the growing



Figure 5: US, Scott #649-650, International Conference on Civil Aeronautics (Washington, DC).

technical potentialities of air transport, which was no longer possible to consider on a purely continental basis.



Figure 6: USSR, Scott #C10, International Conference on Air Mail at The Hague, sponsored by UPU.

THE GENESIS OF THE INTERNATIONAL AVIATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The advent of World War II, while interrupting civilian flying, did not stop international civil aviation, but rather accelerated its development, since it was used for military transportation purposes. As a result of wartime expansion, the technical development of air services had outdated the political and legal framework available to accommodate the increased means of transportation.

By the spring of 1942, more than two years before the end of war, it was apparent that civil air transport would play a large and important role in international relations; serious discussions of political and diplomatic arrangements for international civil aviation had begun mainly in Canada,

the United Kingdom and the United States. At the Anglo-American Conference at Quebec from 11 to 24 August 1943, Roosevelt and Churchill discussed post-war aviation policy and were planning for a United Nations type of organization to handle some aspects of international civil aviation. Further discussions on the subject were held at the Tehran Conference from 28 November to 1 December 1943, by Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin. Meanwhile, as the year 1944 progressed and as the war took a turn for the better, it became even more apparent that the time was rapidly approaching when some nations would want to initiate new international air services on a regular commercial basis.

On 11 September 1944, the United States extended an invitation to fifty-three governments and two Ministers in Washington (Danish and Thai) for an international civil aviation conference to be convened in the United States on 1 November 1944. Because the Dumbarton Oaks conversations (from 21 August to 7 October 1944), the first concrete step towards an international organization for the maintenance of peace and security, were a Washington conference, President Roosevelt requested Adolf A. Berle, Jr., Assistant Secretary of State, Head of the US delegation to the conference, to find another site for the aviation conference. The city of Chicago was suggested, which would bring an international conference to the isolated Midwest. On 7 October 1944, the Department of State announced the selection of the Stevens Hotel in Chicago, Illinois, (see Figure 7) as the site for the International Civil



Figure 7: View of the Stevens Hotel, Chicago.

Aviation Conference.

Commonwealth civil aviation discussions were held in Montreal at the Windsor Hotel (see Figure 8) from 22 to 27 October 1944 in preparation of the Chicago Conference.

Immediately following this Conference and before the Commonwealth representatives would return home, the same hotel would become the host of a two-day Commonwealth meeting on 9 and 10 December 1944.



Figure 8: View of the Windsor Hotel, Montreal.

THE CHICAGO CONFERENCE

The Chicago Conference, as it came to be known, was attended by fifty-two nations together with two observer nations, Denmark and Thailand; Saudi Arabia and the Soviet Union refused to participate. The Conference was attended by 185 delegates, 156 advisers, experts and consultants, 45 secretaries, 105 clerks and stenographers, 306 members of the Conference secretariat and 158 press representatives, for a total of 955 persons participating directly or indirectly. This was estimated to be the largest international conference held in the United States in those years.

The Stevens Hotel, facing Lake Michigan near the centre of the City of Chicago, was built in 1927 as the world's largest and most sumptuous hotel and designed in a modification of the style of Louis XVI. With 28 floors, it contained 3,000 outside guest rooms, each with private bath, a convention hall with 4,000 seats and a rooftop golf course. In 1942, the Stevens Hotel went to war and was occupied by the United States Army during World War II. The hotel reopened to the public in 1943. During the Conference, rooms were rated at \$6 to \$9 per day for double-occupancy bedrooms and at \$4 to \$7 per day for single-occupancy bedrooms.

At the time of the Conference, the Stevens Hotel was one of Chicago's grand but already aging hotels; it was not as commodious in its accommodations as had been expected by most of the participants, who described it as a mammoth second-rate hotel whose lobby was like the lobby of the Grand Central Station in New York. It would take up to one hour a day waiting for elevators and perhaps half an hour a day waiting to complete telephone calls. One reason it was chosen was that Berle anticipated at most a three-week meeting. As it turned out that the Conference lasted 37 days and accommodations could not compensate for the intensities, fatigue and frustrations, many of the participants registered their displeasure with the hotel. However, most delegates and reporters found amusement in the hotel's bar, noting that sleep was the most welcome recreation when sessions sometimes lasted all night.

THE CONFERENCE ACHIEVEMENTS

On 7 December 1944, the Conference concluded with the signature by all delegations present, except Liberia, of a final act which was a formal and official record summarizing the work. The following main instruments were contained in this final act:

1. The **Interim Agreement on International Civil Aviation** was designed to deal with the intervening period until the permanent convention (see below) would be ratified. It came into effect on 6 June 1945, thereby constituting the Provisional ICAO.

2. The **Convention on International Civil Aviation** (see Figure 9) was designed to provide a complete modernization of the basic public international law of the air. After ratification by twenty-six States, it came into effect on 4 April 1947 with the constitution of the new permanent International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO.

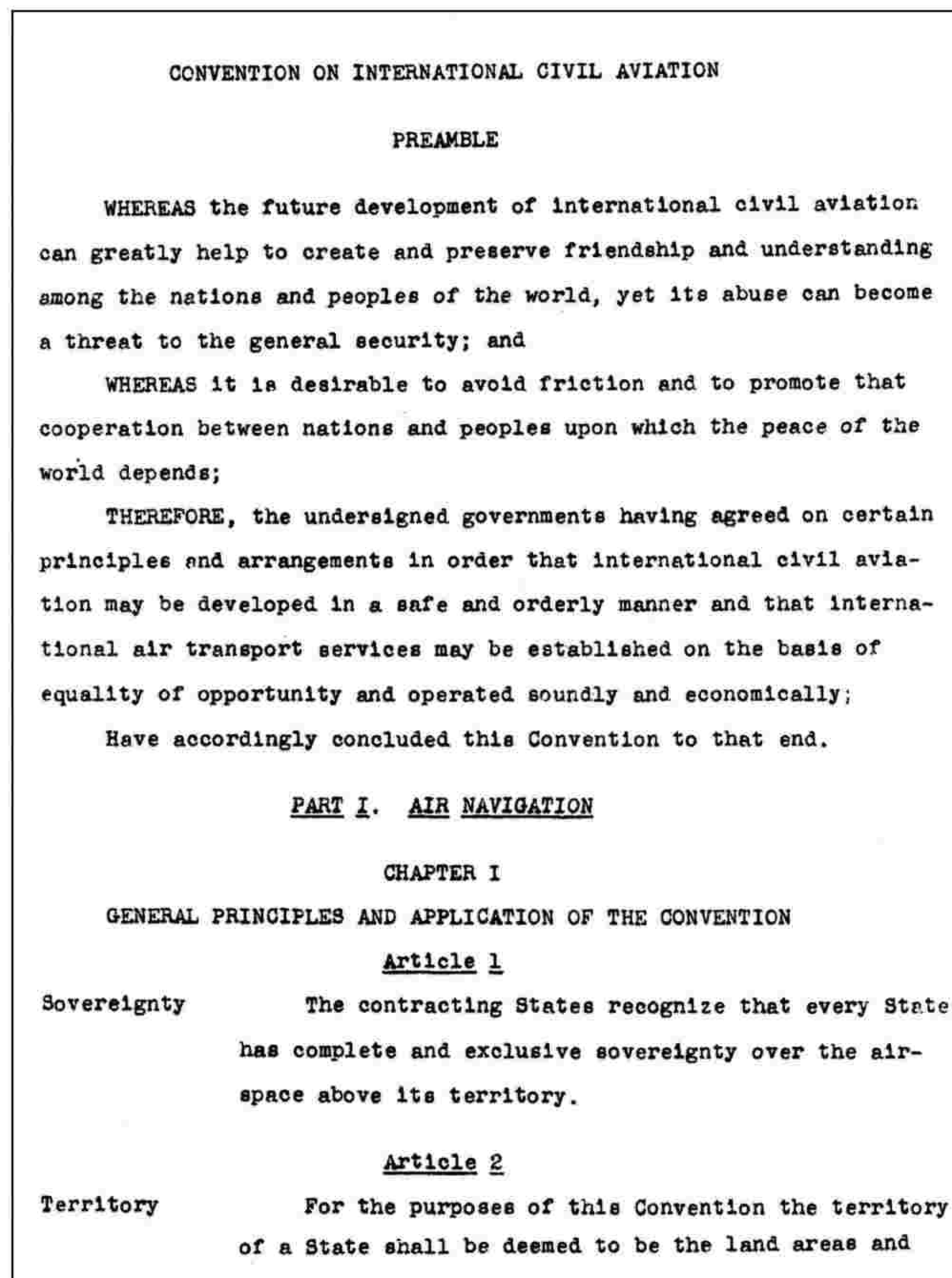


Figure 9: First page of Chicago Convention signed in 1944.

3. The **International Air Services Transit Agreement** or "Two Freedom" agreement, under which the aircraft of member states may fly over each other's territory and land for non-traffic purposes, e.g. refuelling. This document was a great step forward in the path of international air transport development over a large part of the world.

4. The **International Air Transport Agreement** or "Five Freedom" agreement. In addition to the first two freedoms of the agreement mentioned above, three freedoms concerning commercial transport rights were enacted.

5. The **Drafts of Technical Annexes** covering the technical and operational aspects of international civil aviation, such as airworthiness of aircraft, air traffic control, telecommunications, etc. The conference achieved real advances in technical matters which would make international flying much safer, more reliable and more straightforward than it

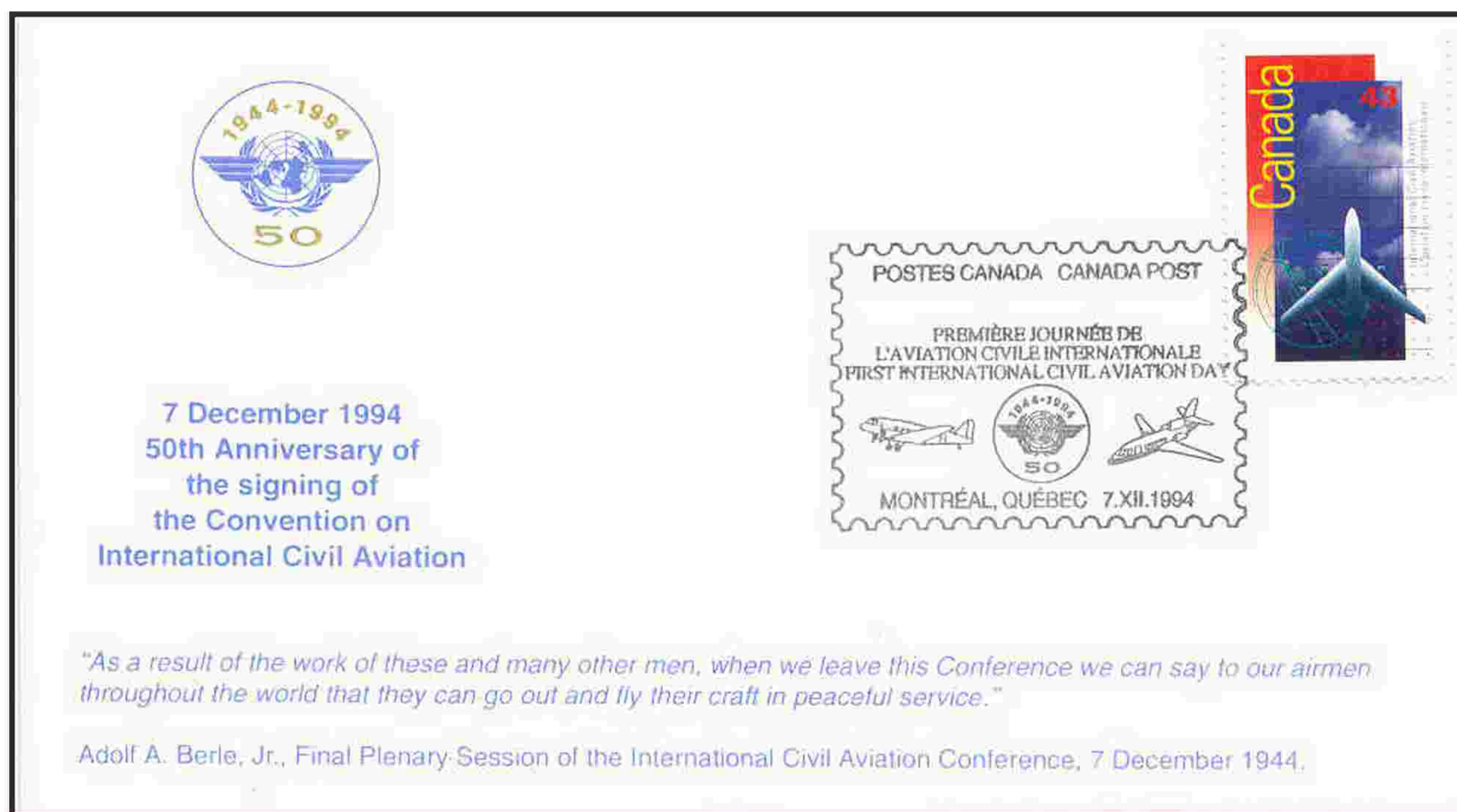


Figure 10: Commemorative cover issued for the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Chicago Convention in 1994.

had been before the Second World War. From the original twelve Technical Annexes defined by the Conference, eighteen Annexes to the Convention are now maintained by ICAO to achieve standardization through a uniform application of international standards and recommended practices.

The Executive Committee of the Conference recommended that the seat of the provisional ICAO be located in Canada, taking into consideration the war circumstances in Europe and the wish to start its work rapidly; Canada was also a logical choice as an important aviation nation and one with strong links with Europe. However, the permanent seat of the Organization would be determined at the final meeting of the Interim Assembly of the Provisional ICAO.

The Final Plenary Session of the Conference was held at 11:00 in the Grand Ballroom with a closing address by Adolf Berle, the Conference Chairman; the quotation on

the first day cover of Figure 10 is from that address.

The International Civil Aviation Conference turned out to be one of the most successful, productive and influential conferences ever held, and the Stevens Hotel in Chicago had been its host. As a result, ICAO became the sole universal institution of international public aviation rights, superseding the Paris Convention of 1919 and the Havana Convention of 1928. For the first time in the history of international aviation, an authority would facilitate the order in the air, introduce maximum standardization in technical matters to unify the methods of exploitation and settle any differences that may occur.

The fourth of April 1997 marked the 50th anniversary of the coming into force of the Convention on International Civil Aviation, which has proven to be remarkably resilient during its first half century by providing a sufficient framework to regulate the safe and orderly development of air transport around the world.

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CHECKLIST

Cuba	284-293	1928 Jan 2	Sixth Pan-American Conference
Egypt	172-176	1933 Dec 20	International Civil Aviation Congress
Peru	C45-48	1937 Sep 15	Inter-American Technical Conference on Aviation
United States	649-650	1928 Dec 12	International Conference on Civil Aeronautics; 25th anniversary of Wright brothers flight
USSR	C10-11	1927 Sep 1	First International Air Post Congress at The Hague, initiated by USSR

