

The actions of the Belarusian state endangered the safety and security of a commercial passenger aircraft and the lives of all those onboard

Thank you, President.

When we discussed this issue immediately after the incident, many Council members emphasised the importance of an international independent investigation. We therefore thank Mr Sciacchitano, the President of the Council of ICAO, for attending the Security Council today to relate the findings of the Fact-Finding Investigation Team, and the subsequent decisions of the ICAO Council and Assembly.

President, it is clear from the investigation that on 23 May 2021, the Belarus authorities deliberately communicated a false bomb threat to Ryanair flight FR4978, before manipulating circumstances to influence the aircraft to land at Minsk airport. That the threat was communicated to the aircraft before the so-called bomb threat email was even sent to Minsk airport, leaves little room for doubt.

It appears the purpose of this brazen and dangerous operation was to arrest and detain a journalist, Mr Roman Protasevich, and his partner Sofia Sapega, who with their fellow passengers happened to be flying over Belarus on their way from Athens to Vilnius.

As the ICAO Council and the Assembly made clear, the actions of the Belarusian state endangered the safety and security of a commercial passenger aircraft and the lives of all those on board. And they were a flagrant violation of the Chicago and Montreal Conventions.

But not only this. As we said last year, the use of a spurious terrorist threat to divert an airliner also served to undermine measures put in place by the international community to counter real aviation terror threats, including those this Council addressed in resolution 2309 in 2016.

So the Lukashenko regime has broken international law, created a major risk to the safety of innocent passengers, and undermined aviation safety more broadly – proving itself to be entirely irresponsible on the issue of international peace and security. And for what? All to silence an opposition journalist, further stifling any semblance of free speech left in Belarus.

This has only been compounded further by its role as a staging-ground and facilitator of Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, through which it continues to show reckless contempt for international law and the UN Charter. We call on Belarus to hold accountable those responsible for this incident, desist from any further such unlawful actions, and end its support for Russia's illegal war on Ukraine.

Thank you.