This year’s theme for the International Civil Aviation Day, “Advancing Innovation for Global Aviation Development”, highlights the importance of aviation and the work of the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) towards sustainable growth and development of the global economy. Despite the threat posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, international air transport remains the most efficient and expedient means for people travelling to different destinations.

The concept of a global village is only possible by an efficient global air transportation network using modern and innovative technologies, connecting more cities on several continents, and facilitating international trade and tourism. With an increase in tourist arrivals in Guyana coming by air, the contribution of air transport to the country's economy is expected to increase even further.

Notwithstanding the impact of the pandemic, international passenger traffic at our international airports is gradually increasing to its 2019 levels. Domestic aviation continues to be a critical engine for the growth and sustainability of the extractive industries including oil and gas, mining, forestry, agriculture and tourism.

Consistent with the ICAO’s theme of Advancing Innovation for Global Aviation Development, the GCAA has made strides in innovation over the years, some of which are:

• The establishment of a modern 3D flight simulator in the Civil Aviation Training School to train our Air Traffic Controllers.
• A computerised Licensing and Examination system to administer computer-based examination for Pilots, Aircraft Maintenance Engineers and Air Traffic Controllers.
• The transition from a paper booklet to plastic card license for aviation personnel, bringing Guyana in conformity with best practices and international standards.
• The establishment a Drones Unit to regulate the use of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles within our airspaces.
• Guyana joined the Green Aviation Initiative by signing onto the Pilot Phase of the ICAO’s Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (CORSIA).

As we celebrate this year’s International Civil Aviation Day, it is worthwhile for the industry and the stakeholders to be reminded that air transport contributes positively to the sustainability of the national economy. Given Guyana’s favourable geographical position and its endowment with unique natural attractions and resources including oil and gas, the aviation industry in Guyana has the potential to grow even faster than it is doing now.

On this occasion of ICAO Day, I encourage the industry stakeholders to promote innovative ideas and technological advancement and for us to continue to work together to keep aviation as the safest mode of transport.

A very happy ICAO Day to all.