

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

August 21, 2025

VIA ELECTRONIC TRANSMISSION

Juan Carlos Salazar
Secretary General
International Civil Aviation Organization
Montréal, QC, Canada

Dear Secretary General Salazar:

We write with deep concern regarding the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s unilateral move to fully open a third extension of the M503 flight route in the Taiwan Strait. This brazen action—which has been years in the making—provokes regional instability in the Indo-Pacific and clearly demonstrates a disregard for international order and the potential dangerous civilian consequences of this decision. We urge the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) to clarify its opposition to unilateral changes in international flight route use without coordinating with regional stakeholders and to ensure that the Republic of China (Taiwan) can meaningfully participate as a guest in the upcoming 42nd ICAO Assembly, and in appropriate ICAO technical meetings, to help prevent adverse consequences of the PRC's action and represent the operations and interests of the Taipei Flight Information Region.

The PRC first opened the M503 flight route, running north-south over the Taiwan Strait, in 2015 in a southbound direction in close 4.2 nautical mile proximity to the median line that unofficially separates Taiwan's airspace from mainland China's. At the time, Beijing assured the international community that the route would be used in a limited fashion and that it would maintain good communication and cooperation with Taiwan in the future on issues related to the operation of M503.¹ However, on July 6, 2025, Beijing announced that it had activated the W121 extension connecting Dongshan in China's Zhejiang province to M503 without prior notice or coordination with Taiwan, and in violation of previous assurances.²

This action places civilian aircraft dangerously close to Taiwan-administered airspace and creates potential conflict points with east-west routes operated under the Taipei Flight Information Region, which handles over 1.85 million flights annually. Such unilateral changes disregard international aviation procedures and ICAO's own standards, which emphasize the importance of coordination and risk mitigation in shared airspaces.

This is especially troubling in light of the fact that Taiwan continues to be barred from meaningful participation in ICAO despite its critical role in global aviation. As the world's 11th-largest aviation market and home to Taoyuan International Airport—a key transit hub in East Asia—

¹ Shelley Shan, *PRC Aviation Routes Protested*, TAIPEI TIMES (Jan. 5, 2018), <https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/front/archives/2018/01/05/2003685206>.

² Yimou Lee & Marius Zaharia, *China Opens Third Extension to Sensitive Taiwan Strait Flight Path*, REUTERS (July 5, 2025), <https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-opens-third-extension-sensitive-taiwan-strait-flight-path-2025-07-06/>.

Taiwan's absence from ICAO meetings and decision-making undermines global aviation safety. This exclusion is not due to performance or capability deficiencies, but rather it is a direct result of relentless political pressure from the PRC. The exclusion of a vital airspace manager out of deference to the political pressure of the PRC, an actor that regularly demonstrates malign intent, jeopardizes not just regional security, but global aviation standards more broadly.

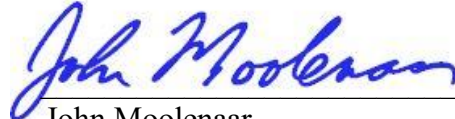
As an organization tasked with ensuring the safety, security, and efficiency of international civil aviation, ICAO must not remain silent. We urge you to publicly state that ICAO does not support unilateral changes to international flight routes that impact regional safety. Additionally, we urge you to include Taiwan in the upcoming 42nd ICAO Assembly as a guest and technical participant.

Thank you for your swift consideration of this request.

Sincerely,



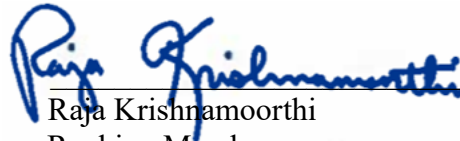
Marsha Blackburn
United States Senator



John Moolenaar
Chairman
Select Committee on China



Gary Peters
United States Senator



Raja Krishnamoorthi
Ranking Member
Select Committee on China