

COELUM.

2020: THE UNPRECEDENTED YEAR.
by Misael Arellano.



DECEMBER NEWS on Mexican Aviation

COELUM: Pronunciation: 'che-l&m, is Latin for airspace or sky. The Romans began questioning the rights they had in the space above the land they owned and to how high above did that right extended to. Ad coelum et ad inferos, they discussed, meaning that their right of property would extend as high up to the heavens and down to hell.

2020: THE UNPRECEDENTED YEAR.

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As occurs around the globe, the new year in Mexico comes as the most challenging year that the country has seen in decades; with regards to the civil aviation, the effects of COVID-19 will differ from all those of previous outbreaks of disease, including SARS, H1N1 and MERS, which peaked after one to three months pre-outbreak levels of travel have been recovered within six to seven months, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA)¹. In that sense and considering that the Civil Aviation Federal Agency (AFAC) is still headless, the Mexican aviation feels like a place without law nowadays.

Having this said, in this Coelum edition we will make an overview of the 2020 in a couple of pages, referring to the number of worldwide cumulative cases of COVID-19 at specific moments in time², as a parameter about how the pandemic development affected described facts.

Mexico began 2020 with a threat seemed far of about an unfamiliar COVID-19 disease while the virus was making its way through China and started to spark fear throughout the world.

In aviation, the country was focused on the continuing of presentations of the Master Plan for the new Santa Lucia Airport and the development of infrastructure associated with the operation of the Metropolitan Airport System that intends to include the existing airports at Mexico City (MEX) and Toluca (TLC) in addition to the new Santa Lucia Airport. The Master Plan was jointly presented by the AFAC and the Ministry of Defense (SEDENA) which was designated by the government to undertake the construction and operation of the new airport.

As referred in this year's January edition of Coelum³ *"...the presentations were received with interest and skepticism considering the major damage caused by the cancellation of the partially constructed new Mexico City airport project in Texcoco and given the continuing and well documented doubts about the technical viability of operating the three airports at the same time; particularly given the impossibility*

to conduct simultaneous operations at MEX and Santa Lucia, which has been loudly voiced by IATA and several other authorized organizations and experts..."; and concluded on February 6, 2020 when the registered number of worldwide cumulative cases of COVID-19 was 30,803.

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On early March, IATA requested the global suspension of the Slot Rules due to COVID-19⁴; however, it was not until the 17th when the AFAC and the General Directorate of Protection and Preventive Medicine in Transport of the Ministry of Transport and Communications, issued the first review to the Mandatory Circular CO SA-09.1/13R1 "Which states the civil aviation contingency plan during public health relevant events", updating the mandatory contingency plan, to establish actions to deal with the outbreak of a communicable disease that represents a risk or emergency for public health of international importance, as well as maintaining operational security conditions at air terminals and contributing to the process of continuity and sustainability of air transport operations, among others.

Finally, international air transport in Mexico was impacted directly in April 2020 when the strongest measures were imposed by foreign governments: the borders closing to foreign passengers and suspension of international flights, after the closing of March with a total of 875,793 cumulative cases of COVID-19 around the world increasing fast and with no control.

After all unstandardized measures imposed at the end of the first quarter, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) published on May 11, 2020 the

1.- <https://www.iata.org/en/iata-repository/publications/economic-reports/coronavirus-updated-impact-assessment/>

2.- <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1103040/cumulative-coronavirus-covid19-cases-number-worldwide-by-day/>

3.- https://www.asyv.com/images/coelum/2016/COELUM_JANUARY_2020.pdf

4.- <https://www.iata.org/en/pressroom/pr/2020-03-02-01/>

Doc 10144 “Handbook for CAAs on the management of aviation safety risks related to COVID-19”⁵ intended to support CAAs around the world with the management of aviation safety risks, which fall under their responsibility during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19); through the development of the main tools for the handling of safety risks, based on the cooperation, collaboration and communication as vital functions exercised by the States in tackling global crises.

“...international air transport in Mexico was impacted directly in April 2020 when the strongest measures were imposed by foreign governments: the borders closing to foreign passengers and suspension of international flights...”

On the other hand, various governments provided aid to their national carriers and/or announced actions to pursue a special aid package to provide relief for the current urgent situation. As described in the May and November Coelum editions⁶ the US, Colombia, Brazil, Germany, France and Italy, among other countries, provided bailouts, compensations, loans, guarantees, exemptions, or term extensions for the payment of taxes, etc., to palliate the effects of the pandemic as well as the different aero political approach taken in order to support the industry.

Unfortunately, the Mexican president rejected any state aid intended for the rescue of companies, including airlines and airports affected by the crisis despite the formal request filed by the IATA presenting all documented figures showing a tremendous impact to national carriers and companies related to air transport services and tourism. This at the worst point of the pandemic with a total of 6,187,617 cumulative cases of COVID-19 at the end May.

Regardless of what was considered the worst phase (at that time) of the pandemic, on June 29, a new amendment to the Civil Aviation Law Regulation was published in the Federal Official Gazette, stating some changes which aim to reinforce criteria already applied in relation to the Civil

Aviation Law, and by the same regulation with regards to: i) the Contract of Carriage; ii) Passengers Rights and Obligations; iii) Non-Discrimination measures; and iv) the transportation of animals. Of course, unnecessary regulations at the time, considering that the air transport services for passengers were reduced by 79% during the second quarter, comparing to the same period in 2019⁷.

During the second half of the year nearly all carriers faced their worst crisis ever. As stated in July’s Coelum edition⁸, in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, airlines from around the world experienced the worst economic crisis in the history of aviation: *“...Revenues have dropped to nearly zero as the future of air travel is being redefined for many years to come. Nothing that was taken for granted for so many decades will continue to be the same and no aviation stakeholder, not only including airlines but also airline suppliers, airports, third party services, lessors, OEMs, financiers, bond holders and countless others, however large successful or strong have been severely damaged at least, if not completely obliterated at worst, all at the sword of this economic and, most importantly, humanitarian crisis of monumental, unprecedented and still unpredictable proportions.”*

“...unnecessary regulations at the time, considering that the air transport services for passengers were reduced by 79% during the second quarter, comparing to the same period in 2019.”

On August 1, 2020, the third revision to the Mandatory Circular CO SA-09.1/13 R3 was published by the AFAC and the General Directorate of Health in Air Transport to minimize the risk of exportation, importation, and spread of any transmittable disease through air transportation during a sanitary contingency. On the other hand, and fortunately in paradox, Mexico was one of the few countries that did not impose restrictive measures related to air transportation, allowing the airlines to operate as demand required. This certainly benefited the aviation industry in the country since neither Mexican nor international carriers were restricted to operate by the

5.- <https://www.icao.int/safety/SafetyManagement/Doc10144/Doc%2010144.pdf>

6.- https://www.asyv.com/images/coelum/2016/COELUM_MAY_2020.pdf and https://www.asyv.com/images/coelum/2016/COELUM_NOVEMBER_2020.pdf

7.- https://www.icao.int/sustainability/Documents/COVID-19/ICAO_Coronavirus_Econ_Impact.pdf

8.- https://www.asyv.com/images/coelum/2016/COELUM_JULY_2020.pdf

Mexican government at any time. Under such scenario, August finished with a total of 25,501,715 cumulative cases of COVID-19 around the world.

On September, 28 president Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador announced that the Federal government made the decision to provide the Secretary of the Navy with full authority and control over seaports. During the course of September 2020, he appointed five high-ranking military generals in charge of Mexico's five largest commercial seaports⁹. September was the beginning of a curious undertaking to subtly militarize transportation sectors in Mexico with the creation of a Military company to administer Santa Lucia's airport operations, and with the flooding presence of the Secretary of National Defense (SEDENA) in Mexican airports. Granting military command to important governmental tasks that has been crystallized with the support of the Mexican military to distribute the COVID-19 vaccines nation-wide.

Under the worst crisis of Mexican civil aviation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the implementation of a 75% budget cut to the running costs of the Federal Government ordered by the Mexican president since April 23rd through a presidential decree, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) conducted a two-week audit to the procedures of the Mexican civil aviation authority and Mexican carriers under the International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA) program. The results of this audit have not been published yet and the audit is still open; however, it is important to mention that the last time in which the FAA conducted an IASA audit to the Mexican civil aviation authority was in 2010 when the US authority determined a downgrading of Mexico to Category 2, resulting on the suspension of additional operations between Mexico and the US, at that time, among other relevant restrictions.

After the referred two-week virtual audit attempt conducted by the FAA to the AFAC which was immersed in its worst time ever, merely the 90% was concluded; planning to continue during February 2021.

Lastly, and waiting for the big closure of AFAC's activities prior to the suspension of services on December 18th because of the holiday's period; the General Director of

the AFAC resigned to his position in the midst of the worst crisis ever faced by Mexican Civil Aviation. To the date in which this article was written, there was no appointed successor of Mr. Vasquez Colmenares so the AFAC continues headless. This as December closed with a total of 83,424,446 cumulative cases of COVID-19.

"...Mexico was one of the few countries that did not impose restrictive measures related to air transportation, allowing the airlines to operate as demand required.."

During 2020 the World Health Organization's (WHO) official numbers about cumulative cases of COVID-19 worldwide¹⁰ were severely criticized by the New York Times and international press because the inaccuracy of data that was later recognized by the WHO through a document named "Log of major changes and errata in WHO", which states Erratum notes reported from February 6, 2020 to date. More accurate numbers during the year were published by private organizations as Statista¹¹, showing a development of worldwide cumulative cases of COVID-19 as follows:

January - 9,927
February - 86,013
March - 875,793
April - 3,279,073
May - 6,187,617
June - 10,447,667
July - 17,593,931
August - 25,501,715
September - 33,999,210
October - 46,117,683
November - 63,347,635
December - 83,424,446
and counting...

9.- The seaports are: Manzanillo, Lázaro Cárdenas, Veracruz, Dos Bocas and Mazatlán. Information provided by Milenio News (<https://www.milenio.com/negocios/sct-nombra-5-militares-directores-generales-puertos>)

10.- <https://covid19.who.int/>

11.- <https://www.statista.com/>

Pilots and controllers asked for priority vaccination.

As the U.S. FAA has authorized pilots and air traffic controllers to receive the covid-19 vaccine to maintain the highest levels of safety in their airspace; in Mexico, similar measures are expected to be applied, for which the Federal Civil Aviation Agency (AFAC) would be responsible for making this decision. Both the Mexican Airline Pilots' Union (ASPA) and the National Union of Air Traffic Controllers (Sinacta) are already considering replicating the same measure. www.a21.com.mx/aeronautica/2020/12/13/piden-pilotos-y-controladores-prioridad-en-vacunacion December 13, 2020.

Seventh air freedom has been sought to mobilize vaccine for COVID-19.

Derived from the growing demand for cargo flights to supply products needed to combat the pandemic by COVID-19, the Latin American Civil Aviation Commission (LACAC) proposed the implementation of the seventh freedom of the air for these services in 22 countries in the region. Jaime Binder Rosas, Secretary of the organization, said that such proposal was made by authorities from Brazil and Chile, so they made a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which would be valid until December 31, 2021, extendable for one more year, for those countries that require it. www.t21.com.mx/aereo/2020/12/17/piden-septima-libertad-aire-movilizar-vacuna-covid-19 December 17, 2020.

U.S. FAA approves use of Moderna COVID-19 vaccine by pilots.

The U.S. Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has approved the use of the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine by pilots and air traffic controllers. However, they must not fly or conduct safety-related duties for 48 hours after receiving doses. Since it will allow to monitor the patient response to each vaccine dose and may adjust this policy as necessary to ensure aviation safety. www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-pilots-idUSKBN28TOWO December 19, 2020.

Mexico keeps borders open to UK flights despite new strain of Covid-19.

The second strain of Covid-19 was identified earlier in December in the UK, the reason why some countries in Europe and others in America restricted their borders to flights from the UK. However, Mexico was the exception, the General Director of Epidemiology, José Luis Alomía, explained that so far the World Health Organization (WHO) has not confirmed that this new variant requires specific protocols, since it is still under study. Suspected cases of Covid 19 are being contained in the places of origin, so the Mexico City Airport "will not have a position beyond that." www.forbes.com.mx/noticias-vuelo-londres-ateriza-cdmx-cepa-covid-reino-unido/ December 20, 2020.

Researchers Propose UVC Radiation to Eliminate Coronavirus in Aircraft.

The Center for Research and Advanced Studies (Cinvestav), with the collaboration of the Queretaro state government together with "Aerocluster", an air manufacturing company, will design a device capable of deactivating the coronavirus in commercial airplanes, since from the control of the air inside the cabins safe trips would be guaranteed even if some of the passengers could be infected by Covid-19. The initiative will aim to design different mechanisms that prevent the spread of virus aerosols generated by infected people to other passengers. This will be possible through different mechanisms. One of them will be through ultraviolet radiation type C (short wave). This strategy will consist of illuminating the virus with radiation, through a pasteurization process, destroying the chemical bonds that make it infectious. www.eluniversal.com.mx/ciencia-y-salud/covid-19-mexicano-proponen-radiacion-contra-el-coronavirus-en-aviones December 21, 2020.

Sustained 4% growth in air cargo expected.

Air cargo transportation will have a sustained growth of 4% during the next 18 years, driven by the increase in sales through e-commerce platforms during the Covid-19 pandemic, where Mexico already ranks first in the world. Benjamin Mejia, Aerocharter's deputy general manager, said that "online purchases have soared worldwide reaching the point where cargo demand is greater than existing fleet capacity, which will encourage company growth and the creation of new businesses". The International Air Transport Association (IATA) forecasts that by the end of 2020 this sector will generate around 117.7 billion dollars in profits, an increase compared to the 102.4 billion generated last year. www.a21.com.mx/aeronautica/2020/12/21/preven-crecimiento-sostenido-del-4-en-carga-aerea December 21, 2020.

National Program of Space Activities Approved.

The Secretariat of Communications and Transportation (Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes, SCT), approved the creation of the Institutional Program of the Mexican Space Agency (Agencia Espacial Mexicana, AEM), called "National Program of Space Activities 2020-2024" (PNAE), which seeks to promote the development of the space sector in Mexico. It has three priority objectives: first, to identify the perspectives and promote the development of space infrastructure for telecommunications, navigation, and global positioning; second, to seek the development of an integral program of national scope for Earth observation; and third, to increase the capacities and promote cooperation in science and technology in space exploration, for the scientific and technological strengthening of the country. www.a21.com.mx/aeroespacial/2020/12/23/aprueban-programa-nacional-de-actividades-espaciales December 23, 2020.

2020 Canceled 21 Years Of Aviation Growth.

Data released by aviation analysis and data business Cirium shows that COVID-19 and its fallout has canceled 21 years of global aviation growth. In fact, this year, airlines worldwide operated 49% fewer flights than in 2019, and passenger traffic was down 67% this year. Cirium says just 16.8 million flights operated in 2020, the lowest figure since 1999. The aforementioned data comes from Cirium's Airline Insights Review 2020, this review uses raw statistics to show the full impact of COVID-19 on the global airline industry. www.simpleflying.com/2020-canceled-21-years-aviation-growth/ December 28, 2020.

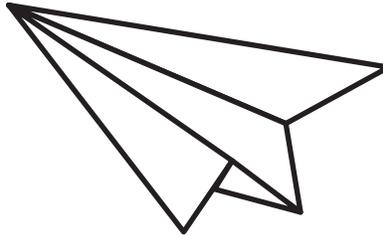
Communications in airports must be digitalized.

The Aeronautical Mobile Aircraft Communication System (AeroMACS), originally developed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), will digitalize airport wireless communications. And is ready to replace radio communications, as the U.S. space agency mentioned. The system will allow the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) personnel located in airport control towers to send critical information digitally and safely, helping to reduce waiting times on the runway by up to 20 minutes. www.a21.com.mx/aeropuertos/2020/12/28/buscan-digitalizar-comunicaciones-en-aeropuertos December 28, 2020.

The International Airport of Mexico City has seen a 57.2% decrease in passengers this year.

The most recent indicators refer to the fact that from January to November of this year 19 million 621 thousand 727 users passed through the AICM, representing a drop of 57.2 percent compared to the same period in 2019 when it mobilized 45 million 805 national and international passengers. Regarding the operations registered in 11 months of 2020, the airport recorded 198 thousand 192, also with a fall of 49.7 percent compared to last year, since 394 thousand 399 incoming and outgoing flights were counted. www.jornada.com.mx/notas/2020/12/28/politica/este-ano-57-2-menos-pasajeros-en-el-aicm/ December 28, 2020.

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