CANSO LEADS CALLS FOR VOLCANIC ASH RESPONSE

- Need for better co-ordination and decision-making at European and global level
- Four recommendations for action

The volcanic eruption in Iceland and the resulting ash cloud is a wake-up call for Europe and a clear sign that better co-ordination structures are necessary, with clear responsibilities and accountabilities, to allow for improved decision-making. It is also clear that more work needs to be done to establish a better understanding of the effect of volcanic ash on aircraft. Some of this work has recently been done in Europe which has led to a reassessment of the safety risk. New or revised international guidance and procedures now need to be determined by ICAO.

CANSO, the Civil Air Navigation Services’ Organisation, released on 23rd April a statement on volcanic ash effects, listing several recommendations to states. It has also called a meeting of European air traffic control experts in May to discuss future action.

The statement (which appears below as Nos 1 to 4) notes that co-ordination arrangements at European and global level need to be improved to allow for better decision-making. It also urges that research on the effects of ash on aircraft engines be speeded up, and new international regulations put in place. CANSO has made four recommendations to states and to ICAO, to help ensure that airspace closures can be minimised. The recommendations include more research on the effects of volcanic ash, better monitoring and more flexible procedures for assessing the danger of ash plumes, and regional contingency plans to be put in place to deal with future events.

Graham Lake, Director General of CANSO, commented, “It is now clear that while air traffic control organisations were involved in developments and decisions at national level, it was left to the Directors-General Civil Aviation, as members of the Eurocontrol Provisional Council, to make decisions on European-wide co-ordination. The Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs) were initially left out of these discussions and their expertise was not at the table when the decision was made to close the airspace. CANSO is bringing together European air traffic control experts
CANSO Members recommend the following actions to minimise the effects of future similar events:

1. Based on lessons learned, improved collaborative decision-making processes and contingency planning is urgently needed. Region-specific contingency plans and arrangements need to be reviewed and/or modified for improved institutional and inter-state co-ordination and decision-making that is supported by the available information and relevant expertise. Roles and responsibilities for decision-making need to be more clearly defined, and it is essential that all stakeholders are involved.

2. Consensus needs to be reached on what is an acceptable level of ash concentration for safe aircraft operation. A way to measure particle size and density also needs to be determined. Further, better and more accurate methods for monitoring ash clouds, their spread and concentration need to be investigated that are real-time based as opposed to theoretical modelling. A more dynamic method of ash cloud monitoring may make it possible to keep more airports open and re-route aircraft and change flight profiles.

3. In the short-term, states and industry should be encouraged to make use of all available data, including real-time engine monitoring, making this data/information readily available and allowing for better risk assessment.

4. In the medium/long-term, ICAO may need to develop new regulatory provisions on operations certification and procedures for the closure of airspace, contingencies and re-routeing.

Within ICAO, CANSO supports the creation of an international multi-disciplinary task force to assess lessons learned, evaluate current volcanic advisory activity and airspace procedures, and determine how best to advance the science of aeronautics in this respect. In addition, CANSO
CANSO is the global voice of the companies that provide air traffic control, and represents the interests of Air Navigation Services Providers worldwide. CANSO members are responsible for supporting over 85% of world air traffic, and through workgroups, members share information and develop new policies, with the ultimate aim of improving air navigation services on the ground and in the air. CANSO also represents its members’ views in major regulatory and industry forums, including at ICAO, where it has official observer status.