It was announced from ITU in Geneva on 11 November that agreement has been reached at the World Radiocommunication Conference held in the city on the allocation of radiofrequency spectrum for global flight tracking in civil aviation.

The frequency band 1087.7-1092.3 MHz has been allocated to the aeronautical mobile-satellite service (Earth-to-space) for reception by space stations of Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) emissions from aircraft transmitters.

It is understood that frequency band 1087.7-1092.3 MHz is currently being used for the transmission of ADS-B signals from aircraft to terrestrial stations within line-of-sight. The World Radiocommunication Conference (WRC-15) has now allocated this frequency band in the Earth-to-space direction to enable transmissions from aircraft to satellites. This extends ADS-B signals beyond line-of-sight to facilitate reporting the position of aircraft equipped with ADS-B anywhere in the world, including oceanic, polar and other remote areas.

WRC-15 recognized that as the standards and recommended practices (SARP) for systems enabling position determination and tracking of aircraft are developed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the performance criteria for satellite reception of ADS-B signals will also need to be addressed by ICAO.

This agreement follows the disappearance and tragic loss of Malaysian Airlines Flight MH370 in March 2014 with 239 people on board, which spurred worldwide discussions on global flight tracking and the need for coordinated action by ITU and other relevant organizations.

It may be remembered that on 1 April 2014, the Malaysian Minister for Communications and Multimedia called upon ITU to develop leading edge standards to facilitate the transmission of flight data in real time. He was speaking at the opening of the ITU World Telecommunication Development Conference taking place in Dubai.
In its special meeting on global flight tracking, which took place in Montréal, 12-13 May 2014, ICAO encouraged ITU to take urgent action to provide the necessary spectrum allocations for satellites to support emerging aviation needs.

Furthermore, in October 2014, the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference meeting in Busan, Republic of Korea, instructed WRC-15 to consider global flight tracking in its agenda.

Said ITU Secretary-General Houlin Zhao: ‘In reaching this agreement at WRC-15, ITU has responded in record time to the expectations of the global community on the major issue concerning global flight tracking. ITU will continue to make every effort to improve flight tracking for civil aviation.’

François Rancy, Director of the ITU Radiocommunication Bureau, added: ‘The allocation of frequencies for reception of ADS-B signals from aircraft by space stations will enable real-time tracking of aircraft anywhere in the world. We will continue to work with ICAO and other international organizations to enhance safety in the skies.’

The World Radiocommunication Conference is in session from 2-27 November at the International Convention Centre Geneva (CICG).