AAPA says health measures must be standardized, consistent, pragmatic and risk managed

With the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) estimating a possible 80% drop in global tourism in 2020, the Association of Asia Pacific Airlines (AAPA) is calling for consistent, pragmatic standardized health measures to be implemented globally, in order to facilitate air travel.

In a statement, AAPA has recognized that public health measures such as widespread testing, contact tracing and social distancing are being implemented around the world, and suggests that any such similar measures being discussed as conditions for air travel must be "consistent, coherent and coordinated amongst governments working closely together with airlines, airports and health authorities, in line with the relevant World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines." AAPA says any measures should be practical and based on accepted medical standards, as part of a risk management framework.

Commenting on the situation, Mr. Subhas Menon, AAPA Director General said, "Wherever possible processes such as travellers' health declarations should be automated and made available on mobile devices for the convenience of the traveling public. Departure screening procedures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 should preferably be applied before travellers board their flights. Precautionary measures onboard are being discussed, and will likely include the compulsory wearing of masks by all travelers and airline crew. Other measures such as leaving the middle seat empty have been suggested, but would make air travel much more costly without any meaningful public benefit in terms of risk reduction."

Mr. Menon added: "The restart of aviation is likely to be sporadic, reflecting uncertainties in the stabilisation of the pandemic and public confidence levels. The resumption of flights is likely to start in the Asia Pacific region given that the region has had more time to deal with the pandemic. A number of governments in the region are already undertaking joint discussions for the resumption of cross border travel, and we applaud these efforts to jumpstart the wider economy, recognizing the crucial role played by the aviation industry.

"The COVID-19 pandemic is probably the greatest challenge that the global air transport industry has ever faced. The industry must introduce and adapt processes to minimize risk while at the same time restoring confidence and trust in air travel. Travelers should be able to undertake journeys with full confidence that measures are being undertaken to protect their wellbeing.

"The resumption of international air travel requires a global approach and harmonized measures across borders. AAPA calls on governments to work closely together and collaborate with industry in developing measures that are standardized, pragmatic, based on accepted medical standards and a robust risk management framework, in our common objective of serving the travelling public and reviving the wider economy," concluded Menon.