

Opening Ceremony
Speech of Mr. Abdul Wahab Teffaha – Secretary General
50th Annual General Meeting
Arab Air Carriers' Organization

**Your Highness Sheikh Dr. Sultan bin Muhammad Al-Qasimi, Member of the Federal Supreme Council Ruler of Sharjah,
Mr. Chairman of the Annual General Meeting,
Your Highnesses and Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is indeed a great privilege for AACO to hold its General Assembly in the Emirate of Sharjah for the first time since its establishment in 1965. For that, I would like to express, personally and on AACO's behalf, my sincere thanks and gratitude to Your Highness for bestowing your high patronage on this AGM.

The Arab air transport sector has taken many great leaps, especially during the last thirty years where the UAE played a key role in transforming the air transport sector from a service sector limited to serving traffic from and to the country, to an essential engine for the national economy, an important driver of investments, and a key source of employment. This has benefited the sustainable development process and launched an unstoppable development cycle.

Many argued that, under the current regulatory environment, the Arab air transport sector would not allow the economic business model of low cost airlines to thrive, especially in countries with high living standards and relatively high GDP per capita. However, the establishment of Air Arabia challenged those arguments through pioneering this business model in the UAE, and from Sharjah in particular. As a result, Air Arabia initiated a business model that was followed by many, and which resulted in the market share of low cost airlines in the Arab air transport market to reach 22% in 2016, from just 5% in 2006.

Your Highness,

The Arab air transport sector has grown exponentially compared to global growth rates: In 2016, Arab airlines transported 96 times the number of passengers they transported in 1965; the year AACO was established. Arab airports handled 341 million passengers in 2016 compared to 3 million in 1965, and Sharjah airport in particular grew from handling 3 million passengers in 2006 to handling 11 million in 2016. And Arab airlines continue to grow despite all the crises that we faced and continue to face in our region.

The decision of authorities in the Arab world to deal with the air transport sector as an essential contributor to national economies is a vital element for the success of Arab airlines. Moreover, Arab authorities' provision of adequate infrastructure for the growth of this sector is also the main artery which allows Arab airlines to compete on the global

level, and to continue to attract passenger through treating them as dear guests whether they are arriving to our countries, departing from them, or transiting through them. Your continuous support through a healthy regulatory environment and an adequate infrastructure for growth is the key foundation through which this growth can be sustained and even strengthened.

**Your Highness,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

There is no doubt that we will witness, in the hospitality of Your Highness during the next couple of days, what distinguishes the Emirate of Sharjah where the cultural dimension is given special attention in the development plans: we certainly need to continue to grow and progress, but to do that while remaining to be connected with the cultural heritage of our land and its people. This is what distinguishes the Emirate of Sharjah and what distinguishes the United Arab Emirates, and indeed what distinguishes us, Arab airlines. Here, I would like to reiterate my thanks and gratitude to Your Highness, and to thank all attendees for participating in this opening ceremony. I would like also to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Chairman of this AGM, Mr. Adel Abdullah Ali, for his efforts to make this General Assembly an exceptional one, for it is the first AGM in Sharjah but certainly will not be the last.

Welcome to all of you,,,

**Abdul Wahab Teffaha
Secretary General**