



AFRICAN AIRLINES ASSOCIATION

Association des Compagnies Aériennes Africaines

SITA: NBOXA8X

Tel: 254 20 2320144/2320148

Fax: 254 20 6001173

P. O. Box 20116 Nairobi 00200 Kenya

Email: afraa@afraa.org

Web: www.afraa.org

AFRAA Media Brief

12 July 2011

AFRAA CONCERNED ABOUT ACCIDENTS IN THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

The African aviation community is profoundly saddened by the fatal aircraft accident in the DRC on 08 July 2011 that saw the loss of over 74 lives. The African Airlines Association (AFRAA) would like to express its deepest regret at the tragic loss of so many lives.

Although the cause of the accident is yet to be established, this is one of the many accidents that have taken place in the DRC in recent years. The aircraft involved was a Boeing 727-030 which was over 45 years old. The age of an aircraft should not matter as long as it is properly maintained but in a country with poor safety oversight and shortage of adequately skilled personnel, such aircraft should never have been allowed to operate. This unnecessary loss of lives is unacceptable and irresponsible. Out of a total of 4 fatal accidents in Africa so far this year, 3 have taken place in the DRC.

In just over five years from 2005 to 2011, the DRC has consistently recorded accidents every year. A total of 25 fatal accidents have occurred in that country in the last five years according to statistics available on the website of Flight Safety Foundation. The total number of fatalities is 366.

These figures clearly show that the authorities in the DRC are not taking their safety oversight responsibility seriously. There is no indication that there are serious efforts being made to improve such a poor safety record.

The DRC needs to appreciate that the poor safety record in that country taints the safety record of the entire continent. What may be viewed as local safety problem has implications for higher aircraft insurance premiums for all African operators. In addition, they have the tendency to discourage people from flying African airlines and consequently negatively impacting the competitiveness of the world class airlines on the continent. Regrettably, such accidents are being used by the EU as a pretext to ban airlines including some with good safety records such as LAM Mozambique Airlines and Air Madagascar, to serve the commercial interests of EU carriers in Africa.

To improve safety on the continent so as to reduce accidents such as these taking place in the DRC, industry stakeholders have come up with programmes to improve safety in Africa including capacity development assistance to States that are serious about improving their safety oversight. ICAO and AFCAC have availed several technical assistance programmes to improve safety oversight capacity of countries and to help address the issue of inadequate skilled manpower and infrastructure. ICAO and AFCAC have also actively promoted the setting up of Regional Safety Oversight Organizations designed to facilitate regional cooperation and help States such as the DRC overcome their safety deficiencies. AFCAC has come up with the AFI Co-operative Inspection Scheme to avail the necessary expertise to assist States address some of their manpower deficiencies. Several States worldwide have availed technical assistance to African States willing to improve and maintain world class safety standards and it appears that the DRC has so far not taken advantage of these assistance programmes.

Several examples clearly show that once a State has the will to adopt industry best practices in safety, it can be achieved. For example, in the early 2000s, both China and Russia had poor safety records. However, these countries were determined that things had to change and within a short period, these countries attained world average safety standards. Nearer home, Nigeria used to be among the African countries with very high accidents rates. However, the Government came up with a series of decisive measures including limiting the age of aircraft imported into the country for civil air transport services and creating an autonomous civil aviation authority with the power to carry out the necessary oversight of all civil aviation activities in the country. Under the visionary leadership of Dr Harold Demuren, Nigerian civil aviation has witnessed a major transformation in recent years.

DRC's neighbour, Angola until 2003 used to record high accident rates but the Government of Angola took a number of important measures, including the ban in the use of ageing aircraft from the former USSR in civil air transport services. The country has since witnessed a dramatic improvement of safety and the process of modernizing the fleet started in earnest even though the country was rewarded by the EU with the infamous blacklist despite such commendable efforts.

The relevant authorities in the DRC have to act as a matter of urgency in the interest of the whole African aviation industry by proactively taking steps to improve safety. The country needs to take immediate and decisive measures to rectify all the deficiencies identified through the ICAO USOAP Programme. Where assistance is needed, organizations such as ICAO, AFCAC, IATA and AFRAA are ready to support as long as the Government is committed and ready to accept its safety oversight responsibilities. The aviation industry expects that the Government immediately withdraw the air operators' certificates of carriers unable or unwilling to adopt industry best practices in safety. In fact, if only DRC and Sudan adopt ICAO stipulated safety standards, the accident rates of the continent would go down to world average levels.

DRC needs not look too far for a recent example of such decisive and commendable actions. The Gabonese Ministry of Transport recently grounded six of the country's eight airlines for failing to comply with ICAO stipulations. This is the kind of decisive action that will generate confidence and respect of the entire aviation community and will help inculcate a safety culture in African aviation.

AFRAA recommends that Governments should require airlines to acquire IOSA certification before being issued air operators' licences. Airlines should be encouraged to be members of IATA/AFRAA as a way of ensuring that they are kept updated on latest developments on safety and to access the wide range of human capital development and other assistance to improve safety. African governments should open up Africa to African operators as stipulated in the Yamoussoukro Decision and allow cross border investments in African airlines so that the carriers can grow and enjoy economies of scale and be able to afford to put in place the required safety management systems. Authorities should have zero tolerance to unsafe operations.

Notes to the Editor

About AFRAA

The African Airlines Association (AFRAA), is a trade association of airlines from African states. Founded in Accra, Ghana, in April, 1968, and headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, the primary purposes of AFRAA are to foster commercial and technical co-operation among African airlines and to represent their common interests.

AFRAA membership cuts across the entire continent and includes all the major intercontinental African operators. The Association members represent 83% of total international traffic carried by African airlines.