

African airline safety shows improvement

It is often said in the aviation industry that Africa has the lowest number of flights but records the highest number of air crashes in the world.



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This has been a damning record over the years, but since the last few years, Africa has improved significantly. This was confirmed by the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Airline operators in Nigeria were piqued during the recent International Civil Aviation Organisation World Aviation Forum (IWAFF) in Abuja when the president of African Development Bank (AfDB), Akinwumi Adesina alleged that airlines in Africa do not maintain their aircraft and that explained why there is a high rate of accidents on the continent.

"Also, Africa needs safe skies. Africa is the riskiest of skies to fly in. While Africa accounts for only 3.4% of all flight departures, it represents over nine percent of all air accidents and 37% of total global air fatalities. Among the 200 airlines blacklisted by the EU, more than 50`5 are African! These are shocking and non-acceptable numbers," said Adesina.

"The reasons are several: old, poorly maintained and inefficient aircraft, poor safety standards, weak navigation systems, traffic management and generally weak inspection and oversight, and non-compliance with safety audits. These must change! Air travel must be safe - and safety should never be compromised," he said.



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Many industry insiders argued that the figures mentioned by Adesina were from the old records; that African countries have improved their safety rating in the past four years. They insisted that there is improved air safety in the region.

The Chairman and CEO of Air Peace, Allen Onyema reacting to the statement credited to AfDB president said that Nigerian airlines are over-regulated by the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) and insisted they could compete with any airline in the world.

He explained that such comments affected insurance premiums paid by African airlines, which he said were having negative impacts on their performances and financial resources.

Onyema said that on the average, Nigerian airlines pay at least \$2.8m for C-Checks of aircraft while their competitors could carry out such maintenances for a mere \$500,000, adding that insurance premiums paid on aircraft is four times more than what legacy airlines pay around the world.

"Nigerian airlines as safe as their counterparts in Europe, America"

Onyema insisted that all Nigerian airlines were as safe as their counterparts in Europe and America despite the harsh operating environment in the country.

"Let me tell you something, which you know, NCAA, in fact, is safety-centric; maybe because of the accidents of the past. They hound the airlines into doing the right thing. We are over-regulated by NCAA. What they can allow in America and Europe, NCAA will not allow it here.

"The money we spend to maintain our fleet, the legacy airlines of this world do not spend it. I have never done any C-check that is less than \$2.8m, yet all over the world, people do C-Check with \$500,000 because some components that will expire in two or three months are still left on the aircraft because they are very close to source of spares and maintenance facilities unlike here that we have to do everything at a go.

"I disagree with Adesina on that statement because this is the assumptions the foreign countries hinge on. They tell you Nigeria is unsafe in order to add more to insurance premiums for themselves. What I pay as insurance premiums on one aircraft, the legacy airlines of this world would pay it on four aircraft. They tell you Nigeria is unsafe and yet, all of them still scramble to come here. It is what I call international aero politics, which is very bad," he added.



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IATA in a recent statement rated the continent's airlines very high in terms of safety and maintenance of their fleet. According to the body, African airlines had significantly improved in safety, which explains why there had not been any commercial air accidents among the carriers in the past two years.

Vice-President, IATA, African Region, Raphael Kuuchi told *ThisDay* earlier in the year that there has been progressive report on air safety in Africa.

"The good news is that throughout the (IATA) conference, probably for the first time in many, many years you haven't

heard Africa mentioned in relation to air accidents, which shows that a lot of things are happening positively in Africa. To start with, traffic is continuing to grow and IATA 20 year forecast indicates that Africa is going to be the fastest growing region in the next 20-35 years and about 5.1 percent growth year in year out. In addition to that; I am sure you all read the media release of IATA about our safety record in Africa which is unprecedented with zero losses for last year.

Kuuchi said Africa also got a number of African airlines which now come onboard IATA Operational Safety Audit (IOSA).



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Chinedu Eze 24 Nov 2017



"I will be taking the message to African governments that much as we have seen safety improvements since the Abuja Declaration (which made IATA Safety Audit mandatory for African airlines) targets were announced in 2012 to the extent that now we are recording zero losses, we do not want to see airlines that are on the IOSA register drop off that register. And so government should help us."

Kuuchi said one of the provisions of the Abuja Declaration was that states should make the Abuja Declaration an integral part of Air Operator Certificate (AOC) renewal for airlines.

"We haven't seen that in many countries, so we will want African government to ensure that when you are renewing airlines AOC, you ensure that they have IOSA and that the IOSA is valid. Now if we do that, then we are going to ensure that once you are on the IOSA registry you must keep on it otherwise you will not get your next IOSA registration," he said.

Both ICAO and IATA have agreed that airline safety has significantly improved in Africa; it is the onus on regulatory authorities and the airline to maintain and improve the safety standard.

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