**Interim SADC Safety Oversight Organization (ISASO) CONFERENCE**

***(Virtual Conference 20 May 2021)***

**Opening Remarks by President - AFCAC**

**Director Generals of Civil Aviation Authorities**

**SADC Secretariat Representative**

**Secretary General of AFCAC**

**Representative of SADC at ICAO**

**Regional Directors of ICAO**

**EU-ASA Project Coordinator**

**Interim Executive Director ISASO**

**Executive Director of CASSOA**

**Executive Director of BAGASOO**

**Dear Colleagues**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

Good morning and good afternoon to you all. It is an honor and great pleasure for me to address you all as the President of the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC) at this important virtual iSASO Conference whose main purpose is to move towards the full operationalization of SASO so that tangible benefits can be provided by the organization to its Member States.

I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the SADC Representative, AFCAC Secretariat, ICAO Regional Directors, the EU-ASA Project Coordinator and ISASO Acting Executive Director for coordinating and facilitating this milestone conference.

AFCAC is aware of the challenges that iSASO is facing in order to be fully operationalised. Despite those challenges, there is light at the end of the tunnel. So far there is no single RSOO that has failed even through success may take time due to a lot of reasons.

The development of the SASO Charter is testimony that there is common understanding on the relevance of the RSOO, commitment of civil aviation authorities of the SADC Region to collaborate and cooperate in the promotion of safe and secure air transport and the development of safety oversight within the SADC region.

As we all know, a number of States might not have the volume and scope of aviation activities to generate the resources necessary for putting into place and maintain a workable safety oversight infrastructure. In such cases, a Regional Safety Oversight Organization can give access to the expertise required through the sharing and pooling of resources, in order to implement and consistently comply with the ICAO Standards and Recommended Practices for safety.

These advantages are evident for smaller or developing States, but can equally apply to bigger and more developed States to harmonize safety regulations and requirements as being observed in other Regions.

**Dear Participants**

Faced with the COVID-19 pandemic which has shrunk aviation activities to an all time low, the SADC region, more than ever before, requires a collaborative approach to resolving current and perceived safety oversight related challenges.

You may recall that the Ezulwini RSOOs Forum of 22-27 March 2017 developed a Roadmap and Action Plan for the improvement and strengthening of RSOOs in Africa. Ever since then, considerable time, money and expertise have been invested into the SASO project by all key stakeholders. For example the SADC Secretariat has provided legal and institutional support to SASO from the beginning; EU projects have over the years been providing institutional support and funding for iSASO; ICAO has provided technical support since the early days of inception of the COSCAP-SADC Project; RSOOs such as BAGASOO and CASSOA have unreservedly shared technical guidance materials and experiences on sustainability to iSASO and last but not least, SADC member States have provided membership contributions tirelessly. All these efforts are recognized and sincerely appreciated.

AFCAC has provided support through the AFI CIS Program which over the years, since 2011, provided capacity building to iSASO experts and also technical assistance missions to a considerable number of SADC member States.

It is about time that we should all, again, put our hands together and give iSASO **a final push** in order to realize the fruits of those efforts. COVID-19 pandemic is signaling powerful winds of change and opportunities to look inwards and join hands. Let SASO take advantage of the winds of change and innovate for the benefits of member states and the safety of Civil Aviation.

The success of the AFI CIS Program is an indicator that sharing of scarce resources is the way forward for all RSOOs in Africa. A recent RSOO platform for African member States, which was established by AFCAC, has facilitated a number of experiences sharing video conferences aimed at strengthening the RSOOs. SASO is further encouraged to reinforce its collaboration with other RSOOs and AFCAC in order benefit from them.

**Ladies and gentlemen**

I would like to conclude my brief remarks by saying that at the heart of the RSOO concept is ICAO’s fundamental principle of cooperation and collaboration. The global air transport system as we know it today was built on cooperation among Member States. In recent years, the emphasis has been on promoting partnerships between States and regional bodies, whether political or economic, as well as with industry, where much of the expertise resides. Specifically, I wish to encourage the SADC Member States to rally behind and support SASO for the benefit of all SADC States.

So let us continue to cooperate and collaborate for sustainable development of air transport in Africa.

I Thank you for your kind attention.