



SA Civil Aviation Authority  
 Private Bag X73  
 Halfway House  
 1685  
 Tel: (011) 545 1000  
 Fax: (011) 545 1201  
 Website: [www.caa.co.za](http://www.caa.co.za)

## **SPEAKING NOTES**

**20 MAY 2021**

# **DRAFT SPEAKING NOTES – DCA SADC AVIATION SAFETY ORGANISATION (SASO) CONFERENCE**

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<b>Event:</b>	<b>(iSASO) CONFERENCE WEBINAR</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>20 MAY 2021</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>VIRTUAL WEB CONFERENCE</b>
<b>Topic:</b>	<b>SASO AND ITS MEMBER STATES</b>

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- Dear Programme, Director.
- Mr Barry Kashambo, ICAO ESAF Regional Director.
- Mr Gabriel Lesa, AFCAC President.
- Mrs Mapolao Mokoena, SADC representative.
- Directors General
- Senior Officials from various governments
- Representatives of all other organisations here today, including from the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), the African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC), the Interim Southern African Development Community Aviation Safety Organisation (iSASO), Regional Safety Oversight Organisations (RSOOs).
- Distinguished ladies and gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure to be part of this Panel and I wish to extend South Africa's appreciation to iSASO for hosting this very important event. I indeed feel honoured to be part of this gathering.

Programme Director, in my view, this session provides us with an opportunity to reflect, engage and exchange ideas of exploring the best possible solutions to

accelerate the implementation of the objectives of the iSASO in relation to its member states.

As member states of the iSASO, we kick started this process about 13 years ago, however, we need to introspect and ask ourselves the difficult question of whether we are, as SADC member states, are we content with the progress that we have accomplished so far?

To be able to reach the goals that iSASO has set for itself, it is paramount to acknowledge that the organisational structure must function properly. We also need to determine what needs to be done to ensure that the iSASO becomes a successful body which may become a benchmark for other similar regional structures. What are we missing to make SASO a reality and to the benefit of the SADC region?

In responding to the above questions, Programme Director, please allow me to begin by providing some of the considerations that, in my view could assist in putting us back on the right path of ensuring that we accelerate the implementation of the iSASO goals, which we have set for ourselves.

## **1. Political will and support**

Ladies and gentlemen, political will is crucial to continue advancing the purposes of iSASO. This will was demonstrated when our governments agreed to establish this body. So, there is no question about the necessity of this organisation in our region. The question however, is why do we seem stuck in accelerating progress towards the full operationalisation of SASO? It is my view that we ought to build on that momentum and as senior officials and representatives of our respective governments, we must emphasise to our political principals the importance of advancing the full implementation of the SASO objectives without further delay. We must prioritise the full operationalisation of SASO to promote the safe and efficient use and development of civil aviation within the SADC region. Aviation is no longer an afterthought, but a fundamental socio-economic enabler for all states. As we have witnessed during the Covid 19 pandemic, civil aviation played a crucial role

in ensuring the movement of health workers from one region to another, repatriation and evacuation of citizens of different countries, the transportation and distribution of medical supplies including the much-needed vaccines, transportation of essential goods including food and personal protective equipment. All this could only be made possible by an efficient air travel system. Now more than ever, the importance of civil aviation was reaffirmed. We therefore should intensify our efforts to strengthen civil aviation in our region and to improve air connectivity among ourselves and the rest of the world. States should guard against being too concerned about their sovereignty; after all, aviation transcends borders, and therefore each state has a role to play in advancing the agenda for safe skies and aviation development in our region.

## **2. Collaboration is a key factor.**

As we all know, collaboration is a key factor. No State will on its own be able to make a significant impact in improving the state of aviation safety in Africa, let alone within our region. We share the skies with users from all over the world, and therefore we need to work together to ensure a safe aviation industry, within our regional borders and across the world. To achieve the ideals of safer skies in our region, we recognised that we needed to be more structured hence as SADC member states we decided to establish this most important structure called SASO which is aimed at advancing the ideals of a progressive aviation sector in our region. Collaboration can therefore be not over emphasised in advancing the ideals and the intent of this establishment as contained in the SASO Charter. This viewpoint is also aligned to the tenets and the spirit of the ICAO's *"No Country Left Behind"* programme. Through increased collaboration, we can achieve more to see SASO fully operational as envisaged.

## **3. Every voice counts**

Programme Director, as I have implied, every country has a contribution to make, and I would like to emphasise that our voices as individual member states should be heard. We need increased, equitable regional participation in strategic discussions to ensure that the iSASO agenda has a balance of views from its member states. States and their contributions should not only be about assistance but should be in pursuit of a comprehensive and inclusive regional

aviation system. Therefore, meaningful participation by all member states is crucial as the full implementation of the SASO mandate will not be fully realised if we do not fully commit to the progress of this important regional body.

#### **4. Regional bodies should share skills.**

The air transport industry has major benefits to the economy and social progress of a country and these benefits also extend to related industries. This is where Regional bodies must take the lead to emphasise the importance of stimulating aviation activity in every country. There should be a sharing of skills, opening up of opportunities for personnel to assist in plugging the gaps in the regulatory system, the exchange of information, and elimination of silos. It is our belief that Africa and the SADC region has capacity and more capacity. The challenge is that we lack a single repository which coordinates efforts from States, that encourages learning from each other, the sharing of information and best practices instead of heavily relying on countries from other continents. SASO should be that glue which holds it together for our region so we can leverage from the strengths of each other. We have a pool of expertise that we can draw from as and when required, but we need a single platform that consolidates all these skills to the benefit of our region. By being forward - looking and gauging what skills we have, what skills will be required especially as we transition to the digital world, such proactive initiatives will prepare us for the future as a region. We need to build a pipeline of skilled professionals, and enough of them, so that when some exit, there are others to take their place.

In recent years, South Africa has taken a lead in these interactions and continue to provide technical assistance to several countries who have indicated the need. These engagements were among others related to flight operations, aviation infrastructure, licensing, examinations, training, inspections, and the development of the aviation medicine capacity. We need more of these initiatives undertaken by States with capacity, and it is our firm belief that the channelling of all cooperation programmes and assistance missions ought to be centralised at SASO so that States can fully and transparently account for their contributions and initiatives.

Peer review mechanism is another way to ensure that the capacity we have in the region is put to good use to ensure compliance with ICAO SARPs. The importance of utilising peer reviews, as a habit cannot be overrated. This is an effort to ensure that we stay ahead and on par with the accepted levels of safety and security. If well-coordinated and done proactively and ahead of time, should put our region in good stead from a compliance point of view.

We should have a platform as member states, where we can share our successes, learn from one another and build our own databanks. In the long run, the trends that we receive from the data available to us will enable us to draft evidence-based standards and or regulations fit for purpose for our region. We must build this regulatory capacity now by strengthening our commitment towards SASO.

## **5. Creating hubs of excellence**

Regional hubs of excellence would be valuable for the cultivation of aviation skills and creating synergies while stimulating progressive initiatives which will see the region growing in terms of air connectivity. Some examples of the hubs of excellence could include among others; training hub, research hub, technology, infrastructure development, manufacturing, etc. Such hubs could become valuable sources of expert skills.

## **6. iSASO needs to gain traction.**

iSASO cannot function without receiving the necessary assistance in terms of resources and finance. Without funding, iSASO will not be able to attract and retain professionals with the right expertise. The recent reports indicate that funding is a challenge and I urge that we keep this agency alive by supporting it financially, for its existence is full dependent on our contributions. iSASO cannot exist if we do not honour our obligations of paying towards its functioning and sustainability. iSASO must be adequately capacitated to deliver on its mandate.

## **7. New insights into the benefits of automation**

Ladies and gentlemen, air transport is a deeply integrated and dynamic sector, one characterised by rapid technological changes that we need to embrace.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has had dire consequences that severely affected the aviation industry, it also provided new insights into the benefits of fully automated systems, even in terms of aviation safety. It is my belief that we can leverage from each other by sharing best practices on technological advancements we are making in our respective States. The truth of the matter is that the world is changing rapidly, and technology is the future and therefore SASO will also need to adapt faster and build systems that will be relevant for the current and future landscape of doing business. Life will not go back to pre-Covid-19 times and adaptation is critical in order to stay abreast of developments but also to be relevant.

## **Conclusion**

As I conclude, I would like to reiterate the following assertions:

1. That, member states should guard against complacency and commit to contributing financial and human resources to make SASO fully operational. If we get the basics right in implementing the decisions previously made, eventually implementation will improve and iSASO will achieve its full potential. In other words, we need to "Walk the Talk".
2. We need to leverage on technological advancements as we operationalise SASO, so we stay relevant as a region and adaptive to the demands of the world that is swiftly changing;
3. Information sharing and exchange of best practices remain essential. We therefore need increased collaboration, cooperation and coordination among member states so we can maximise efforts and avoid reinventing the wheel.
4. As we appreciate the role that the international and regional institutions, such as ICAO and AFCAC play, we need to ensure that the iSASO is provided an opportunity to participate and be represented through a single voice in these strategic decision-making bodies, to better represent the aspirations of our region.

Thank you.

**-ENDS-**