

Nigeria's Way Forward

BY DR. HAROLD DEMUREN

After the unfortunate fatal airline accidents in late 2005, the federal government of Nigeria embarked on a major reform of its aviation industry. The objectives of this reform are to achieve the highest level of safety; enshrine probity, transparency and professionalism in the conduct of aviation business; and restore public confidence. The Presidential Task Force on Aviation and the Ministerial Task Force on Airworthiness and Operational Competency sprang into action — assessing the level of infrastructural decay and commencing a safety audit of the industry, respectively. The government showed commitment by making resources available to effect the reform and provided executive support toward the passage of a civil aviation bill. The accident figures showed that Nigeria needed to change course — to ensure that we join the “league of nations” so that as aviation becomes safer in the world, we also make it safer in Nigeria and the West African subregion.

When I met with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) staff earlier this year, it was very clear why every nation's civil aviation authority and every accident investigation body has to be autonomous. I am happy to report that Nigeria today is making the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA) fully autonomous. Following the passage of the civil aviation bill, there will no longer

be political interference in safety regulation. Achieving this through the primary legislation is an ongoing effort; however, the bill before our National Assembly has passed its first and second readings — and has been subjected to the required process of stakeholder review and a public hearing at the National Assembly — on a fast track to passage. This was a very important step.



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As we looked at the depth of our problems and the level of decay in the Nigerian system and the subregion, we believed that Flight Safety Foundation (FSF) could play a role in analyzing issues while offering expertise on available solutions. In the past, FSF safety seminars and programs have been a major influence for change in the subregion. It has been a desire of the NCAA to bring government and industry to the leading edge, joining the same bandwagon to promote safety, and that is just what is happening.

Recently, I talked with the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), its private sector arm. Both have been very concerned about the safety of air transportation in Nigeria. But they are very pleased that our government is directly confronting aviation safety problems with all seriousness. After looking at our programs in 2006, they said they are happy that we have been dealing with FSF and its air transport safety services, led by Louis Sorrentino of SH&E. They saw the relationship as a plus for us, the right way to go.

First, we had to cope with the acute shortage of skilled manpower within the NCAA. Like many other CAAs, the Nigerian aviation

authority has been plagued by shortages, especially flight operations/airworthiness safety inspectors and air traffic controllers. So, in March 2006, we asked for assistance from FSF, essentially to provide skilled manpower immediately — a secondment of experts to Nigeria. Soon afterward, Lou Sorrentino came with a team of eight experts in the areas of airworthiness, personnel licensing, flight operations, airports, air navigation and aviation security. This involvement already has been of tremendous assistance as they have been working with the NCAA across the spectrum of flight safety. The corporate objective of our organization has been revised, making safety our topmost priority.

The FSF team identified the areas where we needed to make improvements, which we embarked on immediately. The team assisted us by completing a diagnostic on our safety oversight system and organization. The resultant gap analysis of identified deficiencies is now being addressed quickly in preparation for the November 2006 audit by the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Program.

So far, we have focused on putting in place proper systems, processes and procedures for effective safety oversight so that we can meet international standards. Instead of taking years, this is a fast-track approach because we must implement all this before the audit deadline. At the same time, our tasks include steps to pass the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration's International Aviation Safety Assessments (IASA) Category 1 [i.e., "State does comply with ICAO standards"] before the end of 2006. Passing the ICAO audit and

Dr. Harold Demuren discusses NCAA's preparations for international assessments with Stuart Matthews, FSF president and CEO; Louis Sorrentino, SH&E senior vice president; and José Muñoz, SH&E director of safety and civil aviation programs.



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IASA is a test of our ability at the NCAA to provide effective, ongoing regulatory oversight to civil aviation.

Training within government and industry also is critical to ensuring that we achieve our safety objectives. Enhancing human capacity and capability is a major area of our current work. All the efforts discussed above require human beings and won't succeed unless people are well prepared through initial training, continuing training and retraining.

Simultaneously, we have been working with the airport authority to improve aviation security at all our airports. FSF and SH&E also provided the NCAA an expert in aviation security, who assisted us in preparing for the July 2006 follow-up audit under the ICAO Universal Security Audit Program. The expert was of tremendous value in turning things around. We are very pleased that Nigeria now has in place aviation security regulations, aviation security requirements and corresponding training

manuals for airlines, service providers and airports — meeting international requirements.

In addition, Nigeria has embraced the International Air Transport Association (IATA) Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) program, encouraging air carriers that want to operate on international routes to voluntarily embrace IOSA as if the audit were compulsory. Many Nigerian air carriers are already moving in this direction.

While FSF and SH&E have been providing a significant part of the safety oversight and structural support, we have also been receiving assistance from many other organizations: Boeing is providing significant technical assistance with training; Airbus is providing similar programs. IATA is supporting the NCAA with training and IOSA gap analysis for airlines. IATA is also supporting the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency on procurement and maintenance of navigational aids (navaids).

Safety developments also are spreading across the subregion — not just Nigeria — because of

Port Harcourt International Airport, photographed in April 2005, is part of the Nigerian air transport infrastructure being rehabilitated in 2006.

the work of the ICAO Cooperative Development of Operational Safety and Continuing Airworthiness Program (COSCAP)–Banjul Accord Group, comprising the anglophone states¹ of Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. Subregional airline liberalization developments are also spreading under the umbrella of the 1999 decision to implement the Yamoussoukro Decision concerning the liberalization of access to intra-African air transport markets.

Typical problem reports to the NCAA from international pilots have involved nav aids not working and the absence of briefings for weather and nav aid status. We already have taken a major step in these areas by reactivating crew briefing rooms that provide crews with real-time weather information for the departure airport, destination and en route.

Nigerian airport infrastructure rehabilitation includes runway resurfacing, airport security fences, airfield lighting, and rehabilitation of control towers and radar. These are part of the massive development program funded by the government of Nigeria.

It also must be placed on record that half of the air carrier accidents in Africa involve aircraft registered outside Africa and operating illegally in many cases (e.g., aircraft with questionable safety certificates and fake insurance). The NCAA is fighting to ensure that all these illegal operations stop forthwith and to regulate them with requirements similar to those of the United States of America. New regulations have been introduced to require foreign airlines to be issued operations specifications. There will be no room for flag-of-convenience operators. The next hajj operations by airlines [for Muslim pilgrims traveling to Saudi Arabia] will be a true test of our commitment.

At the end of the day, the NCAA expects to say, “We have built a sustainable, world-class safety oversight structure and system for Nigeria — we have promoted global aviation safety.” ●

Note

1. In anglophone states or regions, English is one of the languages used for official purposes.

FSF Seminars

Enhancing Safety Worldwide

October 23–26, 2006

Joint meeting of the FSF 59th annual International Air Safety Seminar **IASS**, IFA 36th International Conference and IATA

Le Meridien Montparnasse, Paris, France

Staying Safe in Times of Change

March 12–14, 2007

Flight Safety Foundation and European Regions Airline Association
19th annual European Aviation Safety Seminar **EASS**

Grand Hotel Krasnapolsky, Amsterdam, Netherlands

The Foundation for Excellence

May 8–10, 2007

Flight Safety Foundation and National Business Aviation Association
52nd annual Corporate Aviation Safety Seminar **CASS**

Hilton Tucson El Conquistador Golf & Tennis Resort, Tucson, Arizona, USA

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