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**MEDIA RELEASE**

**THURSDAY, 13 MARCH 2008**

**SOUTH AFRICAN CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY HOSTS ICAO WORKSHOP ON THE  
PREVENTION OF THE SPREAD OF INFECTIOUS DISEASES THROUGH AIR  
TRANSPORT**

The transmission of infectious diseases through air transport remains a major concern for the global aviation community. It is for this reason that the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) is hosting the first two-day workshop in Africa on the prevention of the spread of infectious diseases through air transport, from Thursday, 13 March to Friday, 14 March 2008. The workshop has been organized by the SACAA on behalf of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Air Transport Association (IATA), Airports Council International (ACI) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and will be attended by experts from Africa.

The International Civil Aviation Organization, which oversees aviation safety globally, has developed some high-level guidelines to assist member states to develop their own plans aimed at mitigating the risks of transmission of infectious diseases through air transport. In accordance with article 14 of the Convention on International Civil Aviation, countries are required to develop national plans to deal with the outbreak of contagious diseases.

The outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in Asia in 2003, as well as the Avian Flu in 2005, was a wake up call for the global aviation community to put proactive measures in place to deal successfully with public health emergencies such as these ones. The aviation industry is most likely to be negatively affected following an outbreak of a pandemic, as people are less likely to fly to parts of the world that are

perceived to be high risk areas for contagious diseases. In the case of Asia, this resulted in huge losses of revenue for the air transport industry as 80% of passengers cancelled their flights to some of the areas affected.

It is for this reason that ICAO has coordinated an international effort to bring together expertise from organizations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and the Airports Council International (ACI), in order to develop Guidelines for States that will assist in their preparedness planning, not only for pandemic influenza but for other communicable diseases that might cause a public health emergency. ICAO gained experience in developing such guidelines during the outbreak of SARS in 2003.

Health issues are now a top priority in the global aviation arena as more and more people are using air transport as their normal mode of transport. According to the latest information from IATA, passenger numbers have grown by 45% over the last decade and have more than doubled since the mid-1970s (*see Annex 1*). It is against this background that issues pertaining to the prevention of the spread of communicable diseases through air transport have become so crucial. It is quite clear that if unchecked, air transport can provide a fertile ground for the rapid transmission of infectious diseases across the world.

Captain Colin Jordaan, Chief Executive Officer of the SACAA and Commissioner for Civil Aviation, says South Africa is very excited for having been entrusted by ICAO to host this important workshop. He says, “A workshop such as this one will assist us in mapping a way forward in our efforts to take control of potentially risky medical issues in the entire value chain of air travel. These are issues that we can no longer afford to take for granted and postpone them for some future action, because they have become a daily reality that we have to deal with, now. If we are not pro-active and put measures in place at this time, we could very likely to be overtaken by some undesirable events in the near future”.

Captain Jordaan says that South Africa, through the SACAA, is a strategic partner in the global efforts to enhance aviation safety, and that the Authority will continue providing assistance to neighbouring countries where we have expertise that is needed.

It is hoped that this workshop will assist role players in Africa to develop national plans, as required by ICAO, which will adequately address Africa's readiness to deal with any contagious diseases that might be spread through passenger utilization of the aviation value chain.

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***Annex 1 on next page.***

## **ANNEX 1: LATEST INFORMATION FROM IATA**

- Aviation provides the only worldwide transportation network, which makes it essential for global business and tourism. It plays a vital role in facilitating economic growth, particularly in developing countries.
- Aviation transports close to 2 billion passengers annually and 40% of inter-regional exports of goods (by value).
- 40% of international tourists now travel by air.
- There are about 900 airlines in the world, with a total fleet of approximately 22 000 aircraft. They serve some 1 670 airports through a route network of several million kilometers managed by about 160 air navigation service providers.

Air transport is one of the world's most important industries, making it one of the greatest contributors to the advancement of modern economies. Since the first jet airliner flew in 1949, the use of commercial aviation has grown more than seventy-fold. This growth is unmatched by any other major form of transport. The continued demand for air services has increased the influence of air transport on the global economy, which has made it possible for the rapid movement of millions of people and goods worth billions of dollars to markets around the world.

The demand for air transport has increased steadily over the years. Passenger numbers have grown by 45% over the last decade and have more than doubled since the mid-1980s. In 2004, the air transport industry carried about 1 890 million scheduled passengers around the world. This rapid growth can be attributed to 4 (four) main factors, namely:

- Rising GDP, disposable income and living standards have increased the demand for air transport for both business and tourism purposes;

- Improvements in airline efficiency and increased competition have reduced the costs of airline tickets by 40% in real terms since the mid-1970s;
- The effects of globalization have increased the demand for air transport; and
- The deregulation of the airline industry, which started in the US in the late 1970s and is now gradually being implemented in other regions of the world, has made air transport more accessible to many people.