



MEDIA STATEMENT

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Civil Aviation Authority to crackdown on illegal drone flying

Midrand, Johannesburg, 02-04-2014. The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) is set to clampdown on the illegal flying, in civil airspace of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) or Unmanned Aircraft Vehicles (UAV), as normally referred to. The move was prompted by recent reports that purported that there are individuals and/or organisations that are already operating or intending to operate UAS in the South African civil aviation airspace.

“It is disconcerting to hear that there are individuals or organisations that, for some reason or another, are determined to contravene applicable international and local aviation prescripts. The fact is that the SACAA has not given any concession or approval to any organisation, individual, institution or government entity to operate UAS within the civil aviation airspace. Those that are flying any type of unmanned aircraft are doing so illegally; and as the regulator we cannot condone any form of blatant disregard of applicable rules,” said the Director of Civil Aviation, Ms Poppy Khoza.

The SACAA, as the regulator in the discharge of its mandate in terms of section 72 of the Civil Aviation Act, 2009(Act No 13 of 2009), with specific reference to the control and regulation of civil aviation safety and security, needs to put regulations in place which will deal with all the regulatory facets relating to UAV’s.

Unmanned aircraft systems or unmanned aerial vehicles are aircraft that can fly without a pilot on board. These aircraft come in all sorts of shapes and sizes and can be controlled remotely by an individual on the ground, in another aircraft or through an on board computer system.

“Unmanned aircraft systems are relatively a new component of the civil aviation framework, one which the SACAA, together with other regulators worldwide and under the guidance of the International Civil Aviation Organisation, are working to understand, define and ultimately integrate in to the civil aviation sector. As such, the process of developing policies, procedures, regulations and associated standards in order to certify and subsequently authorise operation of UAS is currently in progress,” Khoza explained.

South Africa as an ICAO member state is actively involved in the ICAO Unmanned Aircraft Systems Study Group to develop guidance material and standards to guide contracting states in the development of their national guidance material and regulations. In addition, the SACAA is working closely with the industry and relevant agencies to draft appropriate regulations.

There are many factors to consider in the process of developing guidelines for authorisation. “As much as we are enthusiastic about the integration of UAS into the civilian airspace, we need to be mindful of various security and safety aspects. Key among these is the need to ensure that the technology installed on UAS is able to detect and avoid incidents and accidents. We also need to develop robust standards that will ensure separation from other aircraft or objects. There is also a need to ensure that the allocated frequency spectrum is secure in order to ensure protection from unintentional or unlawful interference with the UAS,” Khoza elaborated.

In collaboration with member states, including South Africa, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) is working towards providing a regulatory framework through Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs), with supporting Procedures for Air Navigation Services (PANS) and guidance material, to underpin routine operation of UAS in a safe, harmonised and seamless manner comparable to that of manned operations.

“The SACAA acknowledges that the current civil aviation legislation does not provide for certification, registration and/or operation of UAS in the South African civil aviation airspace. We are also cognizant of the urgent need and demand for UAS usage for commercial and many other reasons. Hence, the SACAA has allocated the necessary resources to the UAS programme to ensure a speedy integration of drones into the South Africa airspace. However, until then we would like to appeal to those that are disregarding the laws to desist from such actions,” Khoza concluded.

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About the SACAA:

The South African Civil Aviation Authority ("SACAA") is a juristic body established in terms of the Civil Aviation Act, 2009 (Act No. 13 of 2009) ("the Act"). SACAA is governed and controlled by the Civil Aviation Authority Board ("the Board"). In terms of mandate, the SACAA is tasked with promoting and maintaining a safe, secure and sustainable civil aviation environment, by regulating and overseeing the functioning and development of the industry in an efficient, cost-effective, and customer-friendly manner according to international standards.

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