

MEDIA STATEMENT

19 JANUARY 2019

South African Airways opts to shut down Blantyre operations following a Level 1 finding by the SACAA

[Johannesburg]. In what the South African aviation regulator described as a welcomed move and an expected response from a responsible operator that understands the importance of aviation safety; South African Airways (SAA) has opted to cancel its operations into and from Blantyre, Malawi.

The self-imposed sanction was the airline's reaction to a Level 1 finding raised by the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) following a base inspection of SAA operations in Malawi.

A Level 1 finding can be described as a severe non-compliance that poses serious safety risk and requires the licence-holder to adequately address the findings and failure of which necessitates immediate enforcement action by the regulator.

The Level 1 finding raised against the national carrier primarily relates to the inadequacy of aviation infrastructure facilities and related emergency support services offered at Chileka International Airport, one of the two Malawian bases utilised by SAA.

The SACAA inspection exposed several non-compliances some of which are cause for serious concern. Notably, the airport's perimeter fence is vandalised and falls short of the set international standards. Due to lack of maintenance, both the ambulance and fire engine are not dependable.

This state of affairs may have catastrophic consequences for the airline's passengers and crew in an event that one of their aircraft or surrounding facilities catches fire because as things stand, that would mean that emergency support services would not be instantly available as prescribed by civil aviation regulations world-wide.

After receiving the inspection report, which also detailed the findings, SAA developed and submitted a corrective action plan (CAP) to the SACAA. Before the SACAA could complete the CAP review process, SAA informed the regulator of its intention to halt operations into and out of Blantyre.

The cancellation of SAA's Blantyre operations is effective Saturday, 19 January 2019 and will remain in place until such time that the findings raised by the SACAA have been adequately addressed and a follow up inspection regarding the findings has been conducted.

While the CAP submitted by SAA offered sufficient detail in terms of how the findings would be addressed; the decision to cease operations is most certainly a welcomed move and depicts a determination by the operator to prioritise safety and compliance above anything else. This gesture was once the hallmark of the South African aviation industry and the bedrock of its remarkable safety record in scheduled commercial operations. It is the SACAA's wish to witness the immediate restoration of this exemplary and mature approach to air transport services and the associated aviation safety and security.

-ENDS-

About the SACAA:

The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) is a Schedule 3A public entity reporting to the Department of Transport established in terms of the Civil Aviation Authority Act, 2009 (Act No 13 of 2009) (the Act). 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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