

MEDIA STATEMENT

24 January 2020

Johannesburg – 11:30 (local time)

Statement by Ms Poppy Khoza, the Director of Civil Aviation (CEO) at the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) on the Flight Inspection Unit aircraft accident that took place in George, Western Cape Province, South Africa on Thursday, 23 January 2010

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen of the media

We called this gathering today with heavy hearts, following a tragic aircraft accident that robbed us of our three colleagues, who undoubtedly still had much to offer the aviation industry. This happened while they were conducting important work that helps uphold aviation safety standards in the country. These young and talented members of the South African Civil Aviation Authority were part of a world-class team that conducted calibration services in South Africa, Africa and the Indian Ocean.

The entire SACAA is mourning the tragic loss of our esteemed colleagues in the devastating aircraft accident that took place on Thursday, 23 January 2020 in the mountainous terrain outside the George Airport in the Western Cape Province.

The Minister of Transport, Mr Fikile Mbalula, the Board, Management and entire staff complement of the SA Civil Aviation Authority, convey their heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the bereaved families and loved ones, including their closest colleagues. We equally extend our sincere condolences to the aviation sector both in South Africa, Africa and the world over, as this team worked with many people across the globe.

The aircraft, a Cessna Citation - S550 – SII owned and operated by the SACAA's Flight Inspection Unit, took off from the George Airport at 10:40 to conduct calibration of the airport's navigation systems. However, shortly after take-off, the air traffic control tower lost contact with the aircraft. As per procedure, a search and rescue operation was immediately activated and ultimately the wreckage was located at around 13:40.

On board the aircraft there were three professionals, all employees of the SACAA; i.e. Captain Thabiso Collins Tolo (49), First Officer Tebogo Caroline Lekalakala (33) and Flight Inspector Gugu Comfort Mnguni (36). It is with deep regret and devastation that we announce that these esteemed colleagues were all fatally injured during the aircraft accident.

The SACAA family and the aviation industry are saddened by the passing of these greatly experienced colleagues who possessed very rare and important skills that ensure that our airports comply with the set international standards. At the time of their untimely passing, we were still looking forward to their immense contribution to the aviation industry and to the upkeep of our country's outstanding safety record. May their Souls Rest in Peace!

Their respective families have been informed and we are offering both their families and staff members the much-needed support and counselling during this difficult time.

The Accident and Incident Investigation Division (AIID) has dispatched a team of investigators to start the process of investigating the cause of the accident, and to collect evidence from the scene.

At this stage we have no details as to what could have caused the accident. Hence, we call on everyone to avoid any speculation and to afford the investigating team the necessary time and space to conduct a thorough investigation so that they can establish the facts as to what might have transpired.

Although accidents do occur in the industry, we want to assure the people of our country that we strive to always adhere to stringent safety rules and procedures, in line with international safety standards. This has thus far ensured that South Africa maintains, for over 30 years, a remarkable safety record, particularly in the large commercial operations sector, i.e. the airline and charter industry.

In accordance with applicable civil aviation regulations, and as dictated by the South African Civil Aviation Regulations, regular maintenance was conducted on the aircraft. We are devastated by what has happened and hope the investigation will provide us with answers as to what might have led to this accident.

Consistent with procedure, a notification of the accident was issued on Thursday, 23 January 2020. A preliminary report is expected in 30 days, and 12 months thereafter an interim report, if the investigation has not been completed by then. The reports are public documents and therefore the families and the public will be informed of the outcomes.

This is a difficult time for us; usually it is the SA Civil Aviation Authority, as the regulator, that has to speak on accidents that occur in the industry, not one of our own. This is the first time that such an accident has taken place, involving an aircraft that belongs to the Civil Aviation Authority. While we mourn our beloved colleagues, we still have an obligation to continue to ensure that the country adheres to all safety standards. To all our colleagues, although it is difficult, the Minister, Board and Management wish you strength. Continue to do your jobs diligently, to help keep our skies safe. The same applies to the industry, continue to uphold the safety standards.

The three colleagues were well-experienced and were among a handful of such specialised crew undertaking this work in the country and on the African continent.

Captain Thabiso Tolo qualified in 2013 and had 4,959 hours of flying to his credit in total. Among others, he was the first Black captain of our Flight Inspection Unit; before that he was a Manager within the CAA's Air Safety Operations Division, i.e. between 2008 and 2011. He was also a pilot at the South African Airways between 2004 and 2008 and was a Testing Standard Officer at the SA Civil Aviation Authority in 2004, and a pilot at the South African Air Force between 1989 and 2003.

First Officer Tebogo Lekalakala had 1050 hours of flying to her credit. She performed her last training as Flight Safety Simulator in San Antonio in the United States. Ms Lekalakala was a Co-pilot and the first Black lady to fly for the Flight Inspection Unit in 2019. Prior to that she was an Air Force pilot between 2006 and 2018.

Flight Inspector Gugu Comfort Mguni had 1,300 flying hours to his credit. He conducted his last training at the Global Navigation Satellite System for Aviation, Eurocontrol in Luxembourg. He was trained in the Flight Inspection System at the CARNAC 30 in France. He became the first Black Flight Inspector for the FIU in 2013. Before he joined the Civil Aviation Authority, he was a Senior Technician at SIA Solution.

I wish to emphasise that this crew had impressive records, and most importantly, still had an immense contribution to make to the aviation industry. The country and the continent have lost very talented individuals. Once again, we convey our deepest condolences and I trust that we will treat this incident with the sensitivity it requires.

We once again appeal to members of the public to afford the investigators the space to conclude their probe. We all want to know what caused the accident.

We also undertake to keep the public informed of the memorial and funeral arrangements, once the families have had the time to finalise them.

Alwehlanga lungehlanga. Silahlekelwe kakhulu singumndeni wakwa SACAA Kanye nemindeni yozakwethu.

Siyabonga.

-ENDS-

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Issued by the South African Civil Aviation Authority

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. The SACAA is governed and controlled by the Civil Aviation Authority Board.