



MEDIA RELEASE

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COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED TO LOOK AT UNMANNED AIRCRAFT SYSTEMS

As part of global initiatives to prepare for anticipated future growth and proliferation of Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS), South Africa is currently putting measures in place to ensure that their introduction into our airspace will not compromise aviation safety and security. UAS, in the language of aviation, refer to aircraft that are not operated by any pilot, from their point of departure to their destination.

Unmanned aircraft have been used successfully for military operations across the world, mainly for intelligence gathering, surveillance, target identification and reconnaissance. These aircraft are also deployed as combat vehicles with varying degrees of autonomy. Here at home, South Africa has been highly successful in the development and application of unmanned aircraft systems for military operations; for example: Denel Aerospace for Surveillance Missions and High Speed Target Practice, and ATE for Artillery Fire Correction Missions.

However, in recent years, demand for their use in civilian roles has experienced a steady increase. South Africa, for example, is one of the first countries that has successfully used unmanned aircraft systems for civilian missions such as monitoring the 1994 Democratic Elections and carrying out crime prevention operations with the SEEKER UAS. Recently, UAS have been used by the South African Weather Services for the rain seeding project in collaboration with ATE.

Unmanned Air Systems are increasingly being considered for a number of purposes, such as:

- dull, monotonous and long endurance missions where human pilots would not want to execute such missions, such as coastal and marine protection;
- dangerous and risky missions that would pose a threat to the life of pilots, such as during meteorological missions in thunderstorms; and

→ for dirty and hazardous missions that would pose a health risk to pilots, such as during nuclear radiation monitoring missions.

The demand for usage in other areas is also increasing, for example: fire fighting management and disaster monitoring; transportation of cargo; border patrol and law enforcement; game counting and prevention of poaching; pipeline / electrical line monitoring; re-broadcasting of radio information; remote environmental research, including pollution assessment and monitoring; as well as for oceanography and other scientific missions.

The operation of UAS in South Africa is currently not governed by any regulations like other civil aviation entities such as airports and airlines. However, the CAA has taken a proactive step by establishing an Unmanned Aircraft Systems Coordinating Committee (UASCOCOM) to look at this aspect. This Committee, which consists of experts from both the CAA and the industry, is in essence a working group of the CAA to spearhead the development of policies, airworthiness standards and regulations required to effectively oversee this sector of the industry.

Mr Obert Chakarisa, General Manager for Aircraft Safety at the CAA, says that the use of UAS will soon become a reality and that thorough preparations are required to allow for successful integration of these aircraft into our national airspace system. “The CAA is very excited about this project. In fact, we pride ourselves in being one of the first civil aviation authorities to have established a dedicated UAS section to do all the groundwork. We are also enjoying the full support of the industry, which will go a long way in making this a success”.

Captain Colin Jordaan, CEO of the SA Civil Aviation Authority and Commissioner for Civil Aviation, says that South Africa will continue to take a leadership role alongside other advanced nations to improve and further enhance the application of civil aviation across the globe. He says, “South Africa is proud to be part of an international study group established by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), to look at all aspects of UAS operations, including their safety. We can assure South Africa that the introduction of these unmanned aircraft systems into our airspace will definitely come with some economic benefits, but safety and security will not be compromised in the process.”

Captain Jordaan says that he is confident that the Committee will execute its mandate very successfully, seeing that it consists of experts from the industry. He says that the Authority will offer the Committee its full support, because it is in the interest of the nation to see the successful and safe integration of UAS into our airspace.

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