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THIRTEENTH AIR NAVIGATION CONFERENCE

Montréal, Canada, 9 to 19 October 2018

COMMITTEE A

Agenda Item 3: Enhancing the global air navigation system

3.5: Other ATM issues

APPLICATION OF ALPHA-NUMERIC CALL SIGNS

(Presented by the United Arab Emirates)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper presents the United Arab Emirates' approach towards the application of alpha-numeric call signs.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The presence of similar call signs by aircraft operating in the same area, at the same time, and on the same frequency may at times give rise to potential or actual confusion or misunderstanding between pilots and ATCOs. The resultant impact can potentially lead to safety related errors or incidents occurring.

1.2 The United Arab Emirates (UAE) General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) established a Call Sign Similarity Working Group as a sub group of the National Airspace Advisory Committee (NASAC). This group comprised of representatives from the UAE's aviation community, including regulators, ANSPs, airports and airlines.

1.3 The objective of the Call Sign Similarity Working Group is to provide recommendations in order to minimise operational risk associated with call sign confusion/similarities and to establish procedures for the reporting and managing of occurrences (potential and actual).

1.4 One of the major outputs from the Call Sign Similarity Working Group was the introduction of alpha-numeric call signs by some of the UAE based airlines. Previously these airlines operated using the commercial flight number as their ATC call sign, which often shared similarities with those used both within the same airline and also with other UAE based operators. Through a collaborative approach to the application of alpha-numeric call signs within these UAE based airlines, a significant additional level of protection for both ATC and pilots against call sign confusion has been enabled.

2. **DISCUSSION**

2.1 Since being introduced in 2017, UAE GCAA and the UAE airlines have been working with ANSPs, airports and civil aviation authorities across the Region to collaboratively increase the allocation of alpha-numeric ATC call signs to scheduled flights.

2.2 The expansion of the application has enabled UAE airlines to now allocate flights to/from destinations in every region with alpha-numeric ATC call signs. Within Emirates Airlines this has led to the number of air safety reports in reference to call sign confusion/similarities to decrease by 45 per cent since implementation of 1 August 2017.

2.3 Increasing the usage of alpha-numeric call signs will not eradicate the potential issues associated with call sign confusion/similarities. A harmonised approach to call sign allocation needs to be agreed to ensure issues do not re-emerge. Call sign confusion/ similarities will require ANSPs to focus on the detection of potentially conflicting call signs before they occur as well a collective approach by the airlines for the application of ATC call signs.

2.4 Further work is also required to ensure unified procedures can be applied between ATC sectors as well as neighbouring air traffic service units (ATSU) to enable accommodation of tactical changes to call signs when issues relating the call sign confusion/similarities may or have occurred.

2.5 ATM system providers should also be encouraged to deliver capabilities for the early detection and alerting of potential conflicts associated with call sign similarities. Through automated system capabilities, ANSPs will be able to provide earlier resolution prior to any realisation of issues associated with call sign confusion/similarities.

3. **CONCLUSION**

3.1 The Conference is invited to note the initiative undertaken by the UAE with the establishment of the Call Sign Similarity Working Group and that the UAE offers to share its experiences and lessons learnt to other states in support of their development of call sign confusion/similarity action plans.

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