



INFORMATION PAPER

**SPECIAL AFRICA-INDIAN OCEAN (AFI)
REGIONAL AIR NAVIGATION (RAN) MEETING**

Durban, South Africa, 24 to 29 November 2008

Agenda Item 6: Development of a set of comprehensive work programmes in the air navigation field, aimed at improving efficiency of the air navigation system (Efficiency Committee)

PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS PLANNING IN AFRICA

(Presented by South Africa)

SUMMARY

This information paper presents the actions undertaken by the SA Civil Aviation Authority and the major South African Airport Operator in preparation for an outbreak of communicable diseases posing a public health risk. This paper aims to stimulate debate by the aviation sector in all ICAO contracting States in Africa, regarding preparation for an outbreak of a communicable disease posing a serious public health risk. It is hoped that this debate will encourage communication between the aviation and public health sectors at local, national and international levels

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The severe impact of the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak in 2003 and the emerging threat of pandemic influenza in 2005 have resulted in a broadened focus on health issues by ICAO. The role of protecting the health of populations through management of the spread of communicable diseases has received a renewed and intense focus through the efforts of the ICAO Cooperative Arrangement for the Prevention of Spread of Disease through Air Travel (CAPSCA) project which commenced in Asia in September 2006. This project ensures cross-organisational cooperation in the development of guidelines for management of the spread of communicable diseases, thereby ensuring a harmonised response by States to an outbreak of a communicable disease posing a public health risk.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 In Africa the CAPSCA project initiatives were introduced at a seminar held in Libreville Gabon in November 2007. At this seminar, the CAPSCA International Coordinating Working Group with representatives from ICAO, WHO, ACI, IATA, RAMT coordinators and experts, highlighted the need for Africa to play a role in the global harmonization effort by establishing an Africa Steering Committee and a supporting technical Regional Aviation Medicine Team (RAMT): Africa. This would entail the appointment of a coordinator and RAMT members, thus replicating the CAPSCA structure that is in place for the Asia-Pacific region, in the African continent. Two subsequent workshops were held in Johannesburg, South Africa and Dakar, Senegal in March 2008. ICAO State Letters encouraging contracting States in Africa to join the CAPSCA project were sent in June 2008.

3. DISCUSSION

3.1 The extent and impact of future pandemics cannot be predicted with any degree of certainty. It is therefore imperative that in mitigation of this risk, States develop Pandemic Preparedness Plans.

3.2 In countries where such plans are in place, the risk of spread through air travel may not have been given sufficient consideration.

3.3 Coordination between the aviation and public health authorities and the formulation of a Risk Communication Strategy that includes the traveller, are essential pillars of Pandemic Preparedness Planning in aviation.

3.4 The need for all contracting States to standardize the approach for management of the spread of a communicable disease by air travel has been identified by ICAO and WHO. This entails inter alia:

3.4.1 The formulation of a national aviation plan that provides for a contact point for aviation preparedness planning. This plan would interface with the general national public health preparedness plan,

3.4.2 A reliable system for informing the public health authority of the imminent arrival of a suspected case of a communicable disease, when air traffic control has been notified of this by a pilot and

3.4.3 A method of assessing preparedness by means of table-top or live exercises involving all relevant stakeholders, especially public health authorities, airports and airlines. This would ensure an adequate response, and improvement of the plan.

3.5 While providing the necessary guidance, the Pandemic Preparedness Plan of each State, needs to be generic and flexible enough to be applicable in various outbreaks.

3.6 Once established, the technical arm of CAPSCA, RAMT Africa, would meet at regular intervals to review and periodically update guidelines issued for airports, airlines and public health authorities regarding preparedness planning. This platform would allow for monitoring and evaluation of developments with a view to continually improving plans and learning from experiences of various stakeholders.

3.7 The ratification and adoption of the amendments to ICAO Annex 9 which became applicable in July 2007 and the WHO International Health Regulations 2005 (IHR 2005) which came into force in June 2007, would provide States with the necessary guidance for achieving harmonisation and ensuring appropriate responses to public health threats.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 Pandemic preparedness planning plays an important role in delaying and mitigating the effects of an emerging pandemic. The risk of the spread of diseases by air travel cannot be ignored. It is only by participating in global and regional structures that African States can ensure adaptation of plans to idiosyncratic political, human and socio-economic circumstances. It is hoped that this special AFI-RAN meeting will signal the beginning of serious debate and planning for the formulation and implementation of Pandemic Preparedness Planning in Africa.