



International Civil Aviation Organization

MIDANPIRG ATM Sub-Group

First Meeting (ATM SG/1)
(Cairo, Egypt, 9-12 June 2014)

Agenda Item 5: Airspace Management Issues

CALLSIGN CONFUSION ACROSS THE UAE FIR

(Presented by United Arab Emirates)

SUMMARY

The purpose of this working paper is to put forward the efforts by UAE to reduce the safety risks associated from Callsign Confusion as it is a general safety area which requires development at a regional level.

Action by the meeting is at paragraph 3.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Callsign confusion is a very significant safety risk within the ATM network and requires addressing by all stakeholders. As traffic levels increase and commonality of routes also increases, airlines and ATS providers need to work collaboratively to ensure that safety significant events are minimized associated to callsign confusion.
- 1.2 Callsign Confusion is not solely a national issue, but a system wide global problem. Similar callsigns have been adopted over the years for many reasons such as flights to Asia containing the number '8', as this is seen as a lucky number or similar callsigns being used for routings to certain destinations for simplicity within flight planning & scheduling. For the UAE a lot of the commonality emanated from the rise of the UAE carriers such as Emirates and Etihad. The expansion of these airlines contained the adoption of basic flight planning principles used for callsign selection with certain destinations or routes.
- 1.3 Safety risks associated with callsign confusion - The dangers associated with callsign confusion are not new and have been well documented globally. In 2003 the French ATM services reported 800 safety occurrences concerning similar callsigns ([Eurocontrol Action Plan 2006](#)). Such events lead to wrong and unsafe levels being assigned, wrong headings or routings being acknowledged, double transmissions blocking congested frequencies, extra mental workload for controllers and for pilots alike and losses of separation.

2. Discussion

- 2.1 The role of minimizing safety implications related to callsign confusion does not just rest with one ANSP or with one airline. System wide collaboration is required from all stakeholders to firstly understand the issues and then work in harmony to formulate the agreed solutions.
- 2.2 Work has already taken place over the years by various nations creating solutions such as Eurocontrol's Callsign Similarity Tool and the implementation of Alpha Numeric Callsigns.
- 2.3 The UAE recognizes the safety implications associated with callsign confusion and has worked on various activities to address some of these issues. These activities will focus on

current traffic levels whilst also future proofing solutions to cater for the predicted growth within its airspace.

- i) **PRISMA 13 Project** - RTCS is a System FPL (SFPL) field next to the Callsign field designed to be used to avoid callsign confusion on frequency by changing the callsign in the track label without changing the actual callsign in the system for billing and DML Logs.
For example: if you had UAE1 and UAE11 on frequency you can change the UAE1 callsign to UAE1XY in the SFPL by typing (UAE1XY) in the RTCS callsign and the track label will change to UAE1XY. This will then be communicated to the aircraft using standard ICAO phraseology in doc 4444.
- ii) **Alpha Numeric Callsign** – During periods of high congestion within the Dubai CTA, callsign confusion within Emirates Airline alone was common. During these periods, pilots may adopt an alpha numeric callsign accommodating the final two letters of the aircraft's registration e.g. UAE123 will become UAE123AG
- iii) **R/T Alert** – With a 7% increase in traffic within the UAE month on month, callsign confusion is becoming more apparent. Sheikh Zayed Air Navigation Centre has published a procedure to advise crews of similar callsigns on frequency to ensure that pilots are alert to the chances of potential issues.
- iv) **Similar Callsign Collection Exercise** – Controllers at Sheikh Zayed Air Navigation Centre over one month collated large amounts of information with regards to the similar callsigns which occur within the UAE FIR. This information will now be used in conjunction with the airlines to de-conflict as much as possible current callsign confusion occurrences.
- v) **NASAC Working Group 7** – As part of the NASAC a specific working group has been established to deal with Callsign Confusion. This Working Group contains members from various stakeholders across the UAE.
- vi)

Reference Link: <http://www.eurocontrol.int/tags/call-sign-confusion>

3 ACTION BY THE MEETING

- 3.1 The meeting is invited to note the efforts and measures undertaken by UAE to mitigate the risk related to the callsigns confusion and take action as appropriate.