



International Civil Aviation Organization

MIDANPIRG Air Traffic Management Sub-Group

Fifth Meeting (ATM SG/5)
(Aqaba, Jordan, 1 – 4 December 2019)

Agenda Item 6: ATM Safety Matter

CALL SIGN SIMILARITY IN UAE

(Presented by UAE)

SUMMARY

The aim of this paper is to address the issue of regional callsign confusion/similarity in relation to commercial air traffic.

Action by the meeting is at paragraph 3.

REFERENCES

- ATM SG/3
- ATM SG/4
- ICAO State Letter Ref.: AN 6/34-14/332
- ICAO State Letter Ref.: AN 6/34-16/173
- MAEP Board/2 Report
- MAEP SC/1 Report
- MIDANPIRG/15 Report
- MIDANPIRG/16 Report
- MIDANPIRG/16-WP/34
- RASG-MID/5 Report
- RASG-MID SAFETY ADVISORY – 04

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Call-sign similarity potentially leads to call-sign confusion, increasing workload for controller and pilots - and may ultimately become a causal factor in safety events, such as level busts, runway incursions. The threat of an aircraft accepting and acting on a clearance intended for another aircraft due to call sign confusion is commonplace.

1.2 At various industry meeting, including the CNS SG/5 Tehran, Iran, 9 – 11 September 2014 it was highlighted that, in order to reduce the number of call sign confusion events, and to increase safety, several airline operators have changed their philosophy to exclusively using alpha-numeric call-signs. The commercial flight number (e.g. UAE503) is replaced by an alpha-numeric call sign (e.g. UAE59CG). Unfortunately the practice is limited by the capabilities of the ANSPs whose airspace is transited.

1.3 ICAO launched survey AN 6/34-14/332, polling states to provide information about the acceptance of alpha-numeric callsigns in terms of ATC system compatibility and regulatory compliance.

1.4 The MAEP SC/1 meeting held Dubai, UAE (20- 22 January 2015) commenced a project to recommend possible solutions to the issue for the region.

2. DISCUSSION

2.1 Those recommended solutions were presented to the RASG-MID/4, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, 30 March - 1 April 2015.

2.2 The UAE reported their efforts to mitigate callsign similarities during the MIDANPIRG/16. Furthermore, the GCAA established its UAE National Airspace Advisory Committee (NASAC) Working Group on “Call Sign Similarity” in 2014 to manage and mitigate the challenge and continues to promote the use of alpha-numeric callsigns.

2.3 The UAE through its NASAC WG ‘Call Sign Similarity’ work published the U.A.E. AIC A01/2015 ‘CALL SIGN SIMILARITY’ that includes recommendations, guidelines and best courses of action in order to minimise the occurrence of Call sign confusion.

2.4 In February 2019, the MID Region Contingency Coordination team (CCT) was activated due to the airspace disruptions caused by the severe restriction of airspace in the Pakistani and Afghanistan FIR. During this contingency air traffic in the MID region, specifically Muscat, UAE and Bahrain ACCs experienced a dramatic increase in overflying traffic. ATC were confronted with a spike in callsign similarities due to this increase in traffic.

2.5 The Pakistan CCT activation reinforced the need for formal cross regional alpha-numeric callsigns (ANCS) initiative. Other regions, such as AFI and ASPAC should be encouraged to push for implementation of ANCS and assure harmonization of processes as was done between the MID and Europe.

2.6 The meeting may wish to note that just the U.A.E. registered Airlines alone contribute over 500 scheduled flights operating with an alpha-numeric ATC callsign on a daily basis.



2.7 Eurocontrol launched the callsign similarity (CSS) Service in 2012 and used a software algorithm to run the schedule of the participating airlines against each other, identifying conflicts and suggesting fixes. This software service has also been provided by the IATA MENA office for airlines that would need such support for schedule- and regional de-confliction.

In the area of Eurocontrol a decrease of 80% of the CSS incidents has been recorded since 2012.

2.8 Challenges in various ICAO Regions continue to restrict airlines for using ANCS. The main challenge identified in most regions is the slow acceptance of ANCS by airports and states. Specifically, the ICAO MID region continues to experience some aerodromes that categorically reject the use of ANCS, despite reports of callsign confusion by ATC and airlines. The reject of ATC flight plans with alpha numeric call signs by a single unit results in the flight having to fall back on the commercial call sign for the entire flight. Obviously, this may contribute to incidents of call sign confusion in all other enroute FIRs of the ATC flight plan.

2.9 ICAO issued State Letter Ref: AN 6/34-16/173 dated June 2016, requesting states to implement MIDANPIRG Conclusion 15/2 and report callsign similarity cases.

2.10 Reporting of callsign similarity/confusion continues to be a challenge in the region. ICAO and IATA have established dedicated email accounts for states and operators to report occurrences. Currently only one state regularly reports such occurrences to either ICAO or IATA.

2.11 The U.A.E. NASAC WG has identified and is currently working on the following topics:

- The requirement to set up unified procedures for tactical call sign de-confliction between two adjacent ATC sectors;
- The ability for an operating crew to request for a tactical call sign change;
- Collection of requirements for a future ATM system, that must feature a ‘built-in’ callsign detection/alerting tool before they occur;
- The requirement to easily record and report callsign similarities and to address them immediately with the affected operators; and
- Support the tactical use of combining numbers of the callsign to mitigate a call sign similarity (e.g. ABC seven-twenty instead of ABC seven-two-zero).

3. SUGGESTED ACTIONS

3.1 The meeting is invited to:

- a) support the CSC initiatives ensuring effective national implementation and cooperation;
- b) encourage other regions to implement the use of alpha-numeric callsigns for ATC use;
- c) discuss resolution of airport reluctance to accept ANCS to identify ways to overcome this issue;
- d) take note of and support the work of the UAE;
- e) encourage the set-up of a national ‘Callsign Similarity Working Group; and
- f) promote the reporting of callsign similarity events to the email addresses: MIDCSC@icao.int and MENACSSU@iata.org.