

**SECOND HIGH-LEVEL SAFETY CONFERENCE 2015 (HLSC 2015)  
PLANNING FOR GLOBAL AVIATION SAFETY IMPROVEMENT**

**Montréal, 2 to 5 February 2015**

**Statement By Capt. V.E.O. Spaine, Chairman,  
Civil Aviation Authority of Sierra Leone**

Mr President of the Council and Council Members, Chairman of the Conference, distinguished delegates.

I bring you warm and fraternal greetings from the courageous people of Sierra Leone who we know have been in your prayers and thoughts since the Ebola Virus Disease outbreak became recognized by the World Health Organization as an epidemic in July 2014.

We have been encouraged in the fight for survival knowing that we were not alone but had the entire World Aviation Community behind our efforts to defeat an unseen but deadly enemy invading our sub region with a ferocity never experienced before on our planet.

The News Release from ICAO on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2014 testifies to your concerns and your efforts to facilitate our presence here in Montréal in the face of a travel ban on our citizens by former friendly States and the warm expressions of concern accorded our delegation since our arrival will never be forgotten in a hurry.

Mr President, the themes for this conference are most appropriate and the timing equally providential.

At the beginning of 2014 we were all aglow with self glorification at the impressive safety record for our industry during 2013 with a total of 265 aviation related fatalities only. Little did we know that the stage for one of the worst periods in aviation safety and threat to growth in the industry was already unfolding.

We were in this very hall in late March 2014 when the seriousness of Ebola began to manifest itself to the world as news of an escalation in Guinea and later Liberia unfolded. We in the Aviation Community had our eyes on the disaster of FLT MH 340 and rightly so as the FLT had virtually disappeared over the South China seas with 239 souls.

By the end of May 2014, the disease had entered Sierra Leone whilst we were again distracted attending the AFCAC and ICAO Regional Aviation Safety Symposium in Dakar, Senegal.

By end of July the situation had progressed to a point when a state of public health emergency was declared in Sierra Leone on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2014 a day after the joint ICAO and WHO news release was circulated on the Ebola virus disease outbreak.

That release was timely as airlines that had enjoyed the most during the prosperous heydays of our States' economic renaissance started voting with their wings and abandoned us at a time when we needed to maintain connections with the outside world to facilitate seamless movement of essential medical, humanitarian and professional assistance.

Even our sister airlines within the region abandoned us. Needless to say, our aviation sector would have grounded to a halt with all the attendant ramifications of industrial unrest, isolation from the outside world, delays in the movement of essential assistance to combat the disease and the eventual collapse of the State economy followed by political insecurity.

Realizing the pivotal role of aviation in facilitating the movement of people and goods at this crucial period, the Sierra Leone Civil Aviation Authority mobilized its limited resources to provide sound leadership in spearheading a professional response through the activation of the relevant provisions in Annex 9 – *Facilitation* - by speedily introducing very high standards of passenger and staff screening at our only international airport which provided a level of comfort and confidence to only 2 out of 9 carriers that opted to stay and support us in our hour of distress. We would like to commend Royal Air Maroc and Brussels Airlines and to use this international podium to thank their governments and the entire airline Management and staff for their unique sacrifice in maintaining their operations and their trust in our ability to keep our airport Ebola free to date.

Mr President, I am happy to inform this august gathering that our collective prayers and effort in defeating EBOLA is beginning to bear sweet fruit as we are now recording single digit new cases in the majority of districts in Sierra Leone and we are confident that our State will be rid of the disease within the next 2 months.

Mr President, fellow delegates, the year 2014 will go down in history as the year that confirmed the dynamic nature of the aviation industry and the need to be ever proactive as events can move with lightening rapidity to overtake and overcome our best efforts.

We have seen how a small conflict in a tiny corner of the globe can pose a significant threat to our industry. The case of FLT MH17 shot down with the loss of 239 souls exemplifies this.

We have experienced how a seemingly insignificant health outbreak in an equally unknown corner of the globe can affect the future growth and sustenance of our Industry through the loss of passenger and airline confidence fuelled by fear amongst the travelling public. E.g. pax load declined from an average 25 000 to 6 000 monthly with its attendant reduction in Airport revenues.

Let me assure this conference of our total commitment to the ideals of ICAO in as far as the programs towards a safer Aviation sector goes and will gladly share our experience gained on tackling the Ebola virus or any other Public Health disease outbreaks when ever called upon.

Finally, Mr President please accept our congratulations to you and the Vice-Chairman of the Conference on your election to navigate us through the stormy debates until we achieve our desired destination.

I thank you for your attention.