

INFORMATION SHARING KEY TO CONFLICT ZONE RISK ASSESSMENT

✈️ “There is an urgent need to utilize and enhance existing mechanisms for the purpose of sharing critical information related to airspace use restrictions that are associated with conflict zones and to ensure robust risk assessments,” participants in the 2nd ICAO High-Level Safety Conference (HLSC) concluded.

The discussion on conflict zone information, of course, was prompted by the tragic loss of the passenger aircraft MH17 on 17 July 2014, apparently by a surface-to-air missile (SAM), as it operated over the Dnipropetrovsk flight information region near Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. ICAO responded quickly with a special high-level meeting on 29 July and formation of the Task Force on Risks to Civil Aviation arising from Conflict Zones (TF RCZ).

The Task Force “identified that both States and airlines could benefit from greater information sharing on conflict zones, including risk assessments for a given conflict area, and that a centralized online resource could help facilitate the exchange of information needed to achieve that objective,” said Dr. Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu, ICAO Council President.

Based on the Task Force recommendations, ICAO is developing a comprehensive conflict zone risk mitigation work programme. In the near-term, the conference recommended: “ICAO should establish, as matter of urgency, a simple centralized web-based repository to make information available which supports the assessment of risks over or near conflict zones¹. The source of this information should be clearly identified in the repository.” This information repository would support the availability of notices to airmen (NOTAMs), aeronautical information circulars (AICs), aeronautical information publication supplements (AIPs), and other types of operational information intended to support the conduct of comprehensive risk assessments related to operations in conflict zones.

ICAO Secretary General Raymond Benjamin noted: “The intention is for this central repository to be hosted by ICAO and to serve as a



ICAO Secretary General Raymond Benjamin, Council President Dr. Olumuyiwa Benard Aliu, and then Air Navigation Bureau Director Nancy Graham leading the 2nd High-Level Safety Conference.

single source for up-to-date risk assessments from States and relevant international organizations. Importantly, it would also link all risk assessment data presented with the State or organization which provided it, and a suitable legal framework would be established to ensure that ICAO would not face liability implications arising from the information which States and agencies submit.”

The Task Force estimated such a web-hosted information database could cost about US\$25 million per year. Concerns were also expressed about managing information which might be unreliable, inaccurate, or contradictory.

Other priorities of the conflict zone work programme supported by the HLSC include the harmonization of terminology used for risk assessments, a comprehensive review of existing requirements and message formats, and industry led-initiatives to share operational information and be more transparent with passengers on conflict zone risk methodologies being applied.

“I think it would reflect on us very badly if we did not see these ideas through to delivery,” stated Patricia Hayes, Director of Aviation in the U.K. Department of Transport.

ICAO will provide an update on the progress of the programme at the 39th session of the ICAO Assembly in 2016.

Dr. Aliu reminded that, under the Chicago Convention, “each State is responsible for assessing civil aviation conflict zone risks in their territories, and for making that information promptly available to other States and airlines.”

Irrespective of the impact of the MH17 disaster, ICAO’s Aviation Security Panel Working Group considers the potential for intentional or unintentional long-range SAM attacks to be rare and of very low risk to civil aviation. ■

¹ ICAO launched its prototype conflict zone risk information repository at the beginning of April 2015.