



CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON A VIABLE AIRLINE INDUSTRY IN WEST AFRICA

Abuja, Nigeria, 27 June 2011

Venue: Hilton Transcorp Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria

Speech by

His Excellency James Victor GBEHO
President of the ECOWAS Commission

- Excellency Mr. Bashir IFO, Acting President of the ECOWAS Bank of Investment and Development (EBID),
- Honourable Mr. Celestin TALAKI, Commissioner for Infrastructure Department at ECOWAS Commission,
- Honourable Air Transport Advisers,
- Dr. Paul-Antoine Marie GANEMTORE, Head of Air Transport Unit at ECOWAS Commission,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and a great honour for me to address this gathering first of all to thank you for being able to join us in this Consultative meeting in Abuja, Nigeria to prepare a roadmap for a Viable Airline Industry in West Africa, today, 27 June 2011.

The objective of the Consultative meeting is to bring together some knowledgeable stakeholders in the air sector within the region in order to lay the basis for a successful organization of an High Level Meeting aimed at achieving a Viable Airline Industry in the ECOWAS region.

Distinguished Guests,

All of you have a long and rich experience in the field of air transport in Africa and the ECOWAS Commission is honoured to host you today and to benefit from your advice in order to achieve good results.

Let me express to you my sincere gratitude for your endeavour and availability to undertake the present Consultative meeting.

Honourable Air Transport Advisers,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ECOWAS Vision 2020 for the air transport sector is to develop a sound and seamless regional air transport system with safe, reliable, efficient and affordable air services, well connected within West Africa and integrated with the global network. This is in compliance with the rules and regulations of the Yamoussoukro Decision for the liberalization of air transport markets in Africa.

The successful development of Air Transport in West Africa will enable our member States to fast track their socio-economic development through easier access to their territories and resources, to consolidate their international and trade relations with donors and partners as well as to

reduce the negative effect of famine, war and epidemics by the rapid conveyance of foodstuffs and medicines. Indeed, aviation should be a catalyst of socio-economic development and integration in ECOWAS region.

The collapse of the traditional flag air carriers such as Air Afrique, Ghana Airways and Nigeria Airways has had negative consequences in West Africa such as the lack of reliable and affordable air links between member States, high tariffs, poor quality of services and no customer rights protection, proliferation of small size (capital), small and medium sized aircraft with obsolete technology, heavily indebted with low productivity, poor management and high operating costs, weakness in international competition.

There is the need to overcome these numerous constraints and to address also the other challenges facing air transport sector within the region especially:

- Inadequate Infrastructures and equipment for airports and air navigation services.
- High level rate of air accidents to improve air safety and security.
- Weakness in cooperation and integration of West African Airlines.

Honourable Air Transport Advisers,
Distinguish Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Noticeable efforts have been made at various levels by the Member States to comply with the ICAO standards on aviation safety and security as well as with the implementation of the Yamoussoukro Decision for Air Transport Liberalization.

Despite the existing efforts of the Airlines to realize the ECOWAS vision, intra-regional air services continue to be inadequate and flight connections both within and outside the region limited, making the ECOWAS

region marginalized in worldwide air transport industry. This situation is one of the major bottlenecks to the attainment of socio economic development and integration

To address this adverse situation, the Thirty-Sixth Ordinary Session of the Authority of Heads of State and Government, held in Abuja, Nigeria, on 22 June 2009, requested that the ECOWAS Commission organize a Meeting of the Directors General of Civil Aviation, and Airlines in order to propose concrete solutions to the air transport crisis within the region.

In application of the Authority Directive, the ECOWAS Commission conducted two meetings of the Directors General of Civil Aviation and Airlines, extended to Airports and Air Navigation services Providers (ANSP) in December 2009 in Accra, Ghana and in May 2011, in Lome, Togo, respectively.

Consequently, the following questions are being asked today in ECOWAS region:

- i. Can West Africa continue to ignore the impact of globalization in dealings and grouping and mergers between airlines like Mega Airlines through world alliances as Star Alliance, Sky Team or One World?
- ii. Why, at the moment of the creation of a Common Air Transport Market in ECOWAS region, and given the imperatives of integration on the ECOWAS region, we continue to think that it is necessary to create only national airlines?
- iii. How do these national airlines intend to finance the investments required for their development, gain access to credit, and also comply with the international standards of aviation safety and security? Must our countries continue to struggle to support

structurally deficient airlines in the presence of profitable foreign airlines operating in our markets?

Yes, we believe it is time to change track by adopting a new approach and a new vision to improve viability and competitiveness as well as safety and quality of ECOWAS airlines in response to the needs of the West African population.

A major feature of the solution lies in our ability to come together to transform the air transport industry in West Africa to become a dynamic driving force that will play a key role in the economic development and integration of the ECOWAS region.

We need to define a bold vision of cooperation and integration of West African Airlines in order to make them survive and prosper in the coming years.

Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

If I were to make some suggestions in the light of our difficulties, these would include the following actions:

The ECOWAS Commission must collaborate with public and private stakeholders with a view to strengthening the airlines cooperation and integration or creating a strong regional air carrier which would be more viable, competitive and profitable.

The ECOWAS Commission is therefore committed to encourage mergers and acquisitions among West African Airlines because as they are today, they are too small and cannot compete favourably in the global aviation market.

Distinguished Guests,

I hope that with your expertise, you will advise the ECOWAS Commission on the best options for the development of the West African Airlines.

Let me put it more graphically by saying that the fate of the ECOWAS Air Transport industry is in your hands.

I have confidence that through the deliberations of the present Consultative meeting, we will be able to make a right choice for the bright future of Air transport Industry in West Africa.

I wish us all a successful meeting because “In Unity lies Strength”.

It is now my honour and pleasure to formally declare the ECOWAS Air Transport Consultative meeting open.

Thank you for your kind attention.