

29 August 2018

To: H.E. Dr. Abiy Ahmed  
Prime Minister  
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Via e-mail: pminfo@pmo.gov.et

H.E. Ato Siraj Fergessa  
Minister of Transport  
Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

Via e-mail: motr@motr.gov.et

Your Excellencies:

The International Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Associations, IFATCA, is a professional entity representing more than 50,000 controllers from 130 countries worldwide. Our Federation expresses concern on behalf of the international controller community on the escalating dispute between the Ethiopian Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and its air traffic control (ATC) personnel.

The removal of qualified ATC staff from operational duties by the Ethiopian CAA in this dispute carries, in our professional opinion, a substantial risk for the safety of all air traffic in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. IFATCA has received reports of unqualified staff obtained from both inside and outside the country being deployed to operational tasks as a replacement for qualified personnel.

The immediate nature of these deployments raises questions as to what level of risk analysis and what mitigations have been conducted and also what, if any, amount of training these external personnel have received that would qualify them to provide services in the airspace concerned.

The minimum ATC training times, as required under Annex 1 to the International Convention on Civil Aviation, have almost certainly been circumvented, exposing air traffic in your country and the travelling public to unacceptable risk. Air traffic controllers in neighbouring countries have informed us of difficulties in coordinating flights to and from Ethiopia and even of safety events at their common borders with your country.

It is generally accepted that Air Traffic Controllers are not universally deployable or interchangeable, as the learning of the specifics of an airport, an area, or a region takes considerable time and effort. An improvised use of mercenary personnel for safety critical functions presents an immediate, grave and unacceptable risk to airspace users.

**- More than 50 Years of Professional Involvement -**  
IFATCA has been representing air traffic controllers since 1961,  
with more than 50,000 members in over 130 countries.

More importantly, the use of unqualified personnel to provide air traffic services constitutes a violation of international requirements, to which Ethiopia has committed to as a signatory to the International Convention on Civil Aviation ('Chicago Convention').

As a signatory to the Chicago Convention since 1 March 1947, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has for decades been a leader by example in aviation safety within the African Region and beyond. It is disappointing to see that these recent developments now risk undermining the reputation of utmost diligence towards safety that the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia has traditionally held so important.

We remind you that past experiences have shown that such measures rarely remain without consequences. One of the worst examples was in 1973, when France attempted to break an industrial action of its civil controllers by replacing them with inexperienced and underqualified military personnel: 68 people died in a mid-air collision over Nantes as a direct result. Airlines and pilots refused to fly into French airspace until qualified personnel were reinstated. This impacted not only the reputation, but also the economy of the country, not to mention the countless lives that were unnecessarily lost.

In the interest of flight safety in the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia and the wider region, we respectfully request that you use your authority and responsibility to bring all parties back to the negotiating table – and if necessary using international mediation - to aim for a resolution of this social dispute and to restore an acceptable level of safety, in line with Ethiopia's international commitments.

IFATCA, as a Federation of aviation safety professionals feels obligated to raise these concerns directly to you, Your Excellency, as a matter of extreme urgency. We trust that you treat our concerns with the attention and impartiality that they deserve. IFATCA also stands by to assist in this situation in any way we can, should you wish us to do so.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.



Patrik Peters  
President and CEO  
IFATCA



Fateh Bekhti  
Executive Vice-President Africa Middle East  
IFATCA

Cc: Dr. Fang Liu  
Secretary General  
International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO)

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