

Africa must implement open skies policy

By [Nicky Smith](#)

5 Jun 2013

Improving safety, cutting fuel taxes and liberalising regulation to allow for greater connectivity between African countries are some of the key issues that must be tackled to boost aviation on the continent, International Air Transport Association's chief executive Tony Tyler said on Tuesday, (4 June)



The signing of the Yamoussoukro Declaration, which was adopted by the African Union in 1989 and which committed African governments to an open skies policy, had not been implemented as planned.

"It was understandable that countries would want to protect national carriers but this had a negative impact on the economy of that country as it has been shown that greater transport connectivity was an economic enabler," he said.

"Too much protection is not good for airlines, there is a point where nurturing becomes over protection," Tyler said.

Africa presented great growth opportunities and is expected to grow at between 5% and 6% a year for the "foreseeable future" Mike Higgins, Iata's vice president for Africa said.

"Creating enabling legislative environments and providing aviation with the support that is required in terms of infrastructure could not be viewed as a luxury," Higgins said. "Greater connectivity in a continent where many countries were burdened with poor road and rail infrastructure, air transport needed to be viewed as the necessity it was," he added.

Development and support needed

Tyler said that in order to support the development of aviation, governments should resist the temptation to tax the industry or to provide inappropriate and expensive infrastructure.

"Taxes on aviation fuel on the continent make the fuel bill for African carriers 21% higher than any other region's operators. Government's should lift their taxation on fuel," Tyler said, adding that this would help the continent's airlines, which are the weakest performers in the world.

Iata's latest economic forecast released this week at the industry association's annual general meeting in Cape Town, shows that among facing some of the highest operating costs the airlines also have the lowest load factors of less than 70%. It forecasts that, despite this, African carriers are expected to report a cumulative profit for of US\$100m.

Iata has been advocating for greater support for the industry in Africa and Tyler said he had met recently with Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, who is the chairman of the African Union Commission, to impress on her the great need for the AU to promote the implementation of the Yamoussoukro Declaration.

Liberalisation

The "European experience" of its open skies policy had shown how liberalisation had boosted the aviation sector in Europe and lifted economic growth and development across the region.

"There is already a model for Africa which shows the way," Tyler said.

Commenting on the safety performance of airlines in Africa Tyler said getting more African airlines onto the Iata Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) registry was key to lifting the performance and the perception of the safety of airlines in Africa.

Last year African airlines signed the Abuja Declaration which aims to improve the safety performance of the continent's carriers. The ambitious programme aims to have all African airlines complete an IOSA audit by the end of 2015.

"It is possible to improve safety in Africa using this certification and this has been proven," Tyler said, referring to the globally comparable safety record of airlines on the continent that are IOSA certified. Iata is working with carriers, even non-Iata members, to apply safe, transparent regulatory oversight of the aviation sector.

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