

East African Community (EAC) Remarks
Awareness and Capacity Workshop on Consumer Protection

Presented by

Mr Paul Christan Rwegasha

Principal Civil Aviation Officer, East African Community,

Guest of Honor;

Representatives of REC's – IGAD, COMESA;

COMESA Secretariat;

Representative from IATA and ICAO;

Delegates and experts present;

Representative Government Ministries and Authorities

Member of the MEDIA

Invited guest ladies and gentlemen,

All protocol observed,

Greeting from East African Community

On behalf of EAC SG Hon Veronica Nduva and DSG responsible for Infrastructure, Productive, Social and Political Sectors Hon. Andrea Aguer Ariik Malueth, I take this opportunity to thank in a special way the Government of the Republic of Uganda for hosting this important awareness and capacity workshop on consumer protection in this beautiful capital city of Kampala and for the hospitality accorded to delegates on arrival.

Allow me also to thank COMESA Secretariat and SATSD Project Team (PMU) for organizing this important workshop in the EAC and Northern Region, This workshop has come at a right time when the EAC Secretariat is in the process

of submitting the harmonized regional consumer protection Regulations to the Sectoral Council on TCM for adoption this year (2024).

Chairperson

Consumer Protection in Air Transport Services is the practice of safeguarding travelers, against unfair practices in the market-place. Consumer Protection measures are often established by law and such laws are intended to prevent providers of air transport services from engaging in fraud or specified unfair practices to gain an advantage over the consumers.

Recognizing that passengers can benefit from a competitive air transport sector, which offers more choice in fare-service trade-offs and which may encourage carriers to improve their offerings, passengers, including those with disabilities, can also benefit from consumer protection regimes.

Government authorities should develop consumer protection legal regime which strike an appropriate balance between protection of consumers and industry competitiveness which take into account the States' different social, political, and economic characteristics, without compromising aviation safety and security. The legal regime should i) reflect the principle of proportionality ii) allow for the consideration of the impact of massive disruptions, iii) be consistent with the international treaty regimes on air carrier liability established by the Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules Relating to International Carriage by Air (Warsaw, 1929) and its amending instruments, and the Convention for the Unification of Certain Rules Relating to International Carriage by Air (Montréal, 1999).

Moreover, ICAO has developed guidance material in such areas as conditions of carriage, fare guarantee, baggage, tariff disclosure, denied boarding and

code sharing. This guidance can, among others, be found in the *Policy and Guidance Material on the Economic Regulation of International Air Transport (Doc 9587)*, with main objectives to protect consumers from unfair trade practices, ensure the availability of accurate information, provide quick and accessible remedies for consumer disputes, and promote consumer awareness.

Chairperson

To help Air Passengers make informed choices among different price and service offerings, consumer education efforts should be considered as an impetus to increase awareness of passenger consumer rights. It is therefore upon industry regulators to think about the consumer interest in a structured manner to take onboard consumer access, choice, information, education, safety and quality, protection of economic interests, fairness and equity, redress, sustainability, privacy and representation.

Furthermore, It is vital that governments, regulators and the flying public understand the balance between protecting consumer rights and protecting sustainable air services. The Regulations should be framed as a partnership between consumers and the industry, to encourage competition, innovation, consumer confidence and enhanced air connectivity.

Chair Person

As I conclude I trust this workshop will induce the participants to the foundational aspects of regulating and supervising market conduct and ensure the protection of consumers of air transport services, the participants will also gain better understanding of common rules and regulations relating to the management of consumer protection cases; policy advocacy; consumer education and empowerment, and handling cross-border consumer protection issues.

Implementation of Consumer Protection practices forge markets work for both businesses and consumers in many ways:

a) Consumers

Consumers need to be able to obtain accurate, unbiased information about the products and services they purchase. This enables them to make the best choices based on their interests and prevents them from being mistreated or misled by businesses. Consumer protection policies, laws and regulations help increase consumer welfare by ensuring that businesses can be held accountable.

b) Businesses

Businesses that are known to treat consumers fairly will gain a good reputation and become more sought after. This increases their profitability and competitiveness which will also lead to economic growth in the long run.

c) Economic growth and competitiveness

Consumer protection contributes to dynamic and effective markets for businesses to grow.

d) Regional Integration

With the emergence of cross-border and digital trade, cooperation on consumer protection amongst jurisdiction becomes a necessity.

I therefore invite government official, civil air transport experts and stakeholders present to take advantage of this workshop to learn more about consumer protection in Air transport, its benefits to consumers, Business, economic development and competitiveness and regional integration. With these few remarks I wish this workshop a successful engagement and deliberations.

I Thank you for your attention