BRIEF STATEMENT ON SAR AND COSPAS-SARSAT

Search and rescue in Zambia is not well organized and it has been very difficult to get those in authority to support and organize search and rescue activities. Search and rescue is not funded and as such it is very difficult to coordinate and get started off for this noble cause of saving lives. The absence of legal framework makes it even more difficult to compel any one or organizations to contribute to or participate in the search and rescue. This affects quick response and effective management of the search and rescue activities.

However, locally we are trying to agree with the Disaster Management and Mitigation Unity to start funding operations of the search and rescue. We seem to be receiving tremendous support. We have also applied to African Civil Aviation Commission (AFCAC) to help organize search and rescue in Zambia and they have already visited our country only awaiting their report.

In Zambia we have one Rescue Coordination Centre (RCC) based at Lusaka International airport and we have four subcentres based at Livingstone, Mfuwe and Ndola airports. In the event of a reported missing aircraft, the RCC is activated immediately. You will notice that the structure is already there, but what is missing is financial support. We have already signed a memorandum of understanding with relevant stakeholders, but when it comes to search and rescue operations this memorandum fails. I feel strongly that we need some legal backing.

All information pertaining to the search and rescue operations is always addressed to the RCC c/o Lusaka Area Control Centre, AFTN address: FLFIZQZX. Contact person is Mr. P. Chiduka, Chief Air Traffic Control Officer. Similar information should be copied to the Director of Civil Aviation, at AFTN address: FLHQYAYA or Mr. A. M. Sinyangwe at FLHQYAYC.

I have little information on the science and functions of the COSPAS-SARSAT. I am aware that this satellite does exist and that it aids search and rescue by trucking aircraft falling off the skies and giving precise location of the crash sites by way of coordinates. I have also heard that there are Local User Terminals (LUTs) in different geographical areas of the world, which facilitate different regions. For example I hear there is one in South Africa

and another one in North Africa. These two cover the entire continent of Africa. My country Zambia gets information from South Africa's LUT.

There was a time when we were requested as a country to apply to COSPAS-SARSAT and I did apply, however, to date we have received no feedback. Whether our application was accepted or not we don't know, but I do recall on two occasions we received messages from South Africa informing us about aircraft crashing. At both occasions the coordinates were provided to Zambia and the information was used to get to the sites soon after receipt of the information.

I still feel strongly that a lot others in the aviation industry in Zambia know too little or nothing at all about the facility and the science behind it. It is my pleasure now that I have been sponsored to participate in this course and learn more about the facility.

I have heard too that there is need to supply information on names of operators and registration marks of their aircraft so that precise information can be passed in case of the crash. I have not done so because I need to know more before demanding for this data from operators. I believe after training I shall be in a better position to understand the functions of the satellite and make good of it for the benefit of my country. I have no doubt in my mind that this search and rescue system will bring about economic benefits in so far as search and rescue is concerned. For sure the system shall be expediting sitting of the missing aircraft and evacuation of the survivors. This way lives shall be saved and cost of searching reduced.

This year on 24th May 2005, a light aircraft with three people on board crashed on the mountain fifty nautical miles south east of Lusaka killing all on board. It took us some good six days to locate the wreckage. The aircraft hit into the trunk of the umbrella shaped tree making it difficult to be seen. It became very expensive every day as we increased the number of search aircraft. We spent about eighty (80) hours in total by the end of the search. It was unfortunate that COSPAS-SARSAT did not pick this aircraft as it went down. Unfortunately too the aircraft had no Emergency Locator Beacon (ELB) and so the search was very frustrating especially that it was in the mountainous area. Preliminary investigation revealed that the ELB had been switched off, as it had become a nuisance, coming on un necessarily and continuously.

I was the Search Mission Coordinator (SMC) and my task was becoming enormous and increasingly difficult everyday. I could plan and coordinate the search as well as accompanying search aircraft on actual search missions. On the sixth day I spotted the aircraft while in a chopper towards sunset. The following day we managed to land at the crash site, cleared the area for a bigger chopper and moved bodies.

There were a lot of false alarms from the general public from different places about location of the missing aircraft especially following radio broadcasts and TV adverts on the missing aircraft.

As an Air Traffic Control Officer and Search Mission Coordinator I learnt a lot from the last accident and I hope this course will enlighten me more on satellite aided search and rescue.

Lastly I would like to thank in advance the Office of the Outer Space Affairs, United Nations in Vienna, Austria and the Department of Transportation in South Africa for sponsoring me for training on this satellite aided search and rescue. I shall treasure highly the knowledge so to be acquired during the course.

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