

Emancipate YOURSELF



The word emancipation evokes pictures of Jean D'Arc or Wangari Maathai. It is inextricably linked to women. But if you look up its true meaning in a dictionary, you'll find that it denotes the concept of free from restraint, control, or the power of another.

Among the headline stories of aviation accidents in Africa, it is easy to forget that thousands of professionals in Africa contribute every day to making commercial aviation the safest form of transportation. They do so not because they expect special recognition. They think safety and act in ways that promote safety because they know the aviation industry depends on it, and because it is the right thing to do. As the Foundation moves towards the award of its first African Aviator Award later this year, aggregate data for the entire continent mask the gains from the professionals and the safety champions. The AviAssist Foundation cannot salute all these men and women individually, although it pays tribute to them through its work. For the emancipation of these African aviation professionals, training is crucial and never ends. *'Elimu haina mwisho'* - a Kiswahili proverb denoting the concept of lifelong learning.

On a recent trip to Africa, I was fortunate to visit both Zambia and South Africa. In both places, the Foundation was taking part in an event that each represented the extremes on the scales of knowledge transfer.

On one side of the scale was the 2012 IATA Africa Aviation Safety Summit. It was transferring knowledge along strategic lines on where Africa is and needs to go when it comes to aviation safety. With presentations on a number of operational issues affecting worldwide and African safety, it did luckily also provide some fuel to Ayittey's Cheetah generation in African aviation.

On the other side of the scale was the Foundation's second annual Airport Rescue & Fire Fighting (ARFF) training at Kenneth Kaunda International Airport in Zambia. That training was a training that, through its many practical sessions by its great instructors, directly contributed to improving the operational readiness of Lusaka's airport fire fighters. It was about training people closest to the hazards. It was pure fuel for the Cheetah generation that seeks knowledge, innovation and look for solutions to their problems.

It is perhaps the fact that AviAssist works on both extremes of the scale makes the work for AviAssist so truly fascinating. By being part of both the old strategic and young operational dialogue, you feel you witness the emancipation of the African aviation safety professional. Both events to me signalled the next stage of professionalism: African aviation safety emancipating itself. The Foundation's event in Zambia was also about capti-

vating and motivating professionals beyond pure monetary motivation. It was an event aimed to drive passion for professionalism. As many African countries ascend along the ladder of Maslow's pyramid of needs, with the physiological and safety needs increasingly met, professionals can now perhaps start choosing a path that is not merely a source of income but also a career that they find fascinating and take pride in.

It also means that such professionals start expecting professional passion from its leaders. Those leaders in turn start expecting people to be proud of their engagement in their aviation safety profession. Gradually, mere collection of salary and allowances is no longer accepted as the only motivation for employment. The New African magazine of May 2012 noted a similar tendency towards a new breed of African leadership beckoning for political offices.

The will to inspire towards professional pride is increasingly an expectation in a continent that sees Ayittey's Cheetah generation move to the front. The African aviation professional is in the process of freeing her/himself from the stigma of unsafety in African aviation.

And this is perhaps why the European Union (EU) aviation safety list proves a bitter pill for Africa's aviation industry to swallow. It grabs this young professional emancipation by the horns and seems to crush it. This is not to say that the EU aviation safety list hasn't strongly supported progress in some parts of Africa. It was Mauritius' Director General Dr. Gungah who underlined this point at the recent IATA-ICAO summit before he stated it's now time to turn the EU safety list into an ICAO instrument to end discussions about hidden agendas.

In managing the relationship between the EU and Africa in the context of the EU safety list, I had to think of wise words spoken by boardmember Bill Voss' in his president's message in Aerosafety World earlier this year, addressing the position of the EU and the USA in global aviation. "Destiny placed the US-EU power axis at the center stage of aviation for 50 years. Our significance over the next 20 years will be defined by our willingness to embrace other regional challenges, and our commitment to solve them. Doing anything less will guarantee a rapid retreat from the spotlight. There may not be too much time left to avoid permanent damage in relationships, in an era that is witnessing an upset in the balance of power that has driven aviation. The future problems of training, growth and congestion will be fought on battlefields in other parts of the world. 'The West' will not even be aware of them unless we choose to make it our business" concluded Voss.

Tom