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From the pilots personal and professional perception

When it comes to matters threatening our passion for something in life, especially if it is part of our livelihood, it is difficult to separate personal feelings with facts and come to terms that what you have known and loved to do up to now, will possibly be taken away.

This has a tremendous impact on the psychology of our members. As pilots we learn how to deal with a great amount of pressure and stress and actively deal with a problem, but when you have no control over your future, hope can easily fade.

We have seen this amongst the Air Namibia pilots (and also with our friends and colleagues affected in other flying jobs) since the onset of the Covid pandemic. The news of our national airline closing down, significantly added to this.

Pilots are highly trained experts in their field, dedicating their lives to aviation. This is enshrined further into us by regulations set to keep us operating safe and on par with all the technology on board the aircraft. These are a group of professionals that can't just be filed into another group of "white collar" workers and as such needs to be looked after on other terms due to regulations, training, advancement of technology and dedication required.

The option of flying for another airline is also off the table, as there simply just aren't any jobs readily available. Also, almost 75% of our pilots currently have expired licences, which without, will almost be impossible to apply successfully for another job. Even if one were lucky enough to find such a job, it would mean leaving Namibia, friends, family and one's culture with an "eviction" notice in hand. 77 Professional Namibian airline pilots will possibly be made redundant and left without hope to pursue their aviation career. For most it is not only a job, but a way of living.

Economic and social considerations

Far more importantly for the country and its citizens though, is that the social and economic impact will be severe.

The sudden removal of our national airline will have a profound negative impact on the economy that will be felt by most sectors in our economy. If one looks at " The economic impact of Air Namibia "report (2017 report based on 2015/2016 financial year) from Oxford Economics, the following can be deduced: the core impact of the airline can be summarized as direct, indirect and induced and plays a vital role in Namibia's economy. To only highlight some facts (according to the report): during the 2015/16 financial year, Air Namibia sustained 4550 jobs (directly and indirectly), raised N\$316 million in tax revenue and contributed N\$704 million to our GDP.

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The tax revenues alone were equivalent to 55% of the subsidy received by the airline for 2015/16. One could also further argue that the number of people that will be directly affected by the closure of Air Namibia will be much higher. The 2015/16 Income and Expenditure Survey done by the Namibian Statistics Agency shows an average household in Namibia to be 4,2. That would suggest a total of 19 110 citizens (4550x4.2) will be affected.

Global experience shows us that once a national airline closes, it takes a tremendous amount of effort and financial investment to get a new airline going again. As an example, the national airline of Uruguay, PLUNA (est. 1936), filed for liquidation in 2012. Today, 9 years later, the country still has no national airline or any other domestic commercial flights. Please let that sink in. The list of countries that have gone through similar experiences and outcomes are plenty. Currently there are 20 countries in Africa without a flag carrier. Should Namibia be added to this list and can we really afford to not have a national airline?

Our sentiment and views are shared with IFALPA (to which NAPA is affiliated) that the closure of our national airline, is NOT at the best interest of our country. A country as big and sparsely populated as ours, with addition to being fairly “isolated” in economic terms, is dependent on a national airline and as such it is a fundamental pillar of our infrastructure.

Our hope is that the best possible solution is indeed found in the form of Air Namibia continuing to fly and service Namibia and its people.

Sincerely

Heino Jakob

NAPA president

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