

SA hosts African airports conference

PRETORIA: Government has a well-defined strategy to drive regional co-operation across the African continent, says Deputy Transport Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga.



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"... Government has entered into a number of bilateral agreements aimed at strengthening both diplomatic and economic relations between countries in the region.

"These agreements were primarily forged in order to drive and promote inter-regional trade, cooperation and interdependency to ultimately achieve economic development," she said.

Deputy Minister Chikunga was speaking at the 23rd Airports Council International (ACI) Africa Regional Assembly, hosted by Airports Company South Africa (ACSA) in Durban on Monday, 13 October.

"We are excited that the timing of the conference coincides with October, our Transport Month in South Africa, where all modes of transportation from aviation to rail, road and maritime feature prominently in our national calendar," she said.

The gathering of government representatives and airport leaders also placed the spotlight on the biggest outbreak of the deadly Ebola virus.

Deputy Minister Chikunga reiterated the South African government's unwavering support of ACI member countries battling the virus. She said government was committed to minimising the spread of Ebola across borders.

Dedication to excellence

ACSA boss Bongani Maseko said ACSA has always been proactive in achieving service excellence in line with its strategy to build an efficient and effective customer-focused business.

He said ACSA would continue to focus on building working relationships with other airports companies across the globe.

ACI Africa: Secretary General, Ali Tounsi, pointed out that there were large service discrepancies across the continent.

"There are various reasons, some of which can be partly attributed to different cultures, languages and geographical dimensions of countries. A big challenge is also the issue of safety with the African continent having the worst safety ranking in the world.

"With so much likely to happen economically in Africa over the next few years, airports will play a hugely important role and need to be given priority attention if they are to help the continent realise its undoubted potential."

Tounsi said ACI member states must use the assembly to exchange ideas and share insights on how best the industry can improve the service levels rendered to customers.

"Air travel reduces commuting timelines and connects different countries in the region. Our passengers need to have a common experience regarding levels of service across the region and this is what the industry needs to strive towards," said Tounsi.

ACI Africa has 59 members operating 251 airports. In 2012, these airports collectively handled 153 million passengers, 1,795 tonnes of air cargo and over 2.5 million aircraft movements.

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