OUTCOMES OF VIRTUAL EMERGENCY CAPSCA MEETING, 19 MARCH 2020

BACKGROUND

Following the World Health Organization (WHO) declaration of COVID-19 outbreak as Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC), following the rapid increase in confirmed cases globally with the mode of spread being through air transport. At the beginning, China was the epicentre of the spread to other parts of the world, mainly to Europe. Ultimately, WHO declared COVID-19 as a pandemic after the levels of spread and infection became unprecedented.

The trend has changed with Europe becoming the epicentre and most of the cases reported in Africa imported from Europe. Whereas the COVID-19 prevalence remains low and very few States reporting no cases, there is need for robust system at ports of entry, to prevent further spread globally.

It is, therefore, prudent that ICAO and WHO, guide all stakeholders to take the necessary actions on the preparedness and response to the outbreak under the auspices of the Collaborative Arrangement for the Prevention and Management of Public Health Events in Civil Aviation (CAPSCA) programme. For reasons beyond control and the need to avoid close human contact, a virtual emergency CAPSCA meeting, held on 19th March 2020 with ICAO, Eastern and Southern Regional office as main facilitator.

Invitation was extended to stakeholders including, States, CAAs, Airport Authorities, relevant Health Officials, the AUC, Africa CDC, AFCAC, IATA, ACI, AFRAA, ICAO ANB, Aircraft Manufacturers, with the objective of developing outcomes that will help a common approach and appropriate harmonised actions.

OBJECTIVES

Maintain the momentum in strengthening the preparedness, prevention of spread and establishment of appropriate measures in line with CAPSCA and WHO requirements and guidelines.

Raise awareness amongst the aviation industry towards achieving the common understanding of combating the spread of COVID 19 through the air transport.

The main outcomes include the following:

1. There is need to review and revise the status of airport public health emergency preparedness plans, including their periodic testing, in order to ensure current and future implementation requirements;

2. WHO, UN Agencies, donors, partners and international/Regional organizations must support states in ensuring aggressive and sustainable supply of PPEs and diagnostics kits;

3. In order to obtain consistent screening results, WHO and Africa CDC should provide technical specifications for thermal cameras and non-contact digital thermometers to be used at passenger body temperature screening points;

4. States should endeavor to adopt best practices, lessons learnt from Ebola epidemic and ongoing COVID-19 initiatives, and share experiences amongst States and organizations towards peer support to effectively identify, quarantine and treat infected cases;

5. Urge all States to implement 100% body temperature screenings at terminal arrival and departure processing points, including transfer passengers by applying the multilayer mechanism to avoid any potential loopholes;

6. There is need to boost the African continent level with respect to State preparedness, case response and management, and infection control;

7. In order to have harmonized guidelines in the region, relating to restrictions on flights during outbreaks of communicable diseases, to avoid decisions contradicting international/regional/national requirements, it was recommended that AUC/ICAO/ AFCAC take it up with States as a matter of priority;

8. To ensure effective response and prevention of spread of communicable diseases such as COVID-19, harnessing synergies of available resources from States, donors and partners should be given priority;

9. Encourage African State to develop repatriation and self-quarantine procedures to the extent possible;

10. States, Governments and CAAs must be urged to practice flexibility of Humanitarian air operations (goods and personnel) to ensure continuity of business;

11. It is recommended that ICAO and AFCAC coordinate with AFRAA, IATA, ACI Africa, ANSPs, and CAAs towards advocating to the African Union for providing financial relief measures to address the impact of COVID-19 on the aviation sector;

12. In order to have effective Airport Public Health Emergency Plans, all stakeholders should be involved in development, periodic testing and implementation of the plans, including training and sensitization activities; and,

13. States are encouraged to have an efficient communication system in place in time of crisis to share best practices and provide vital information and data to international organizations (ICAO, ACI, IATA, etc.) in order to provide for adequate response and more importantly to prepare for the appropriate business recovery of the aviation sector.

WAY FORWARD

In order to keep the implementation of the outcomes, maintain momentum of the efforts undertaken and proactively plan for the aftermath of the pandemic, the forum will continue to hold virtual meetings and plan future activities beyond COVID-19 as part of the CAPSCA programme strategy. ICAO ESAF in collaboration with WHO will convene a follow up virtual meeting after a period of 2 weeks, as part of monitoring and evaluation of implementation of the subject outcomes.