



Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association – South Africa  
PO Box 151, Tarlton, 1749 South Africa  
[www.aopa-sa.com](http://www.aopa-sa.com) [admin@aopa.co.za](mailto:admin@aopa.co.za)  
Phone: 079 421 2425 Fax: +27 86 510 8501

Mr Jim Coon  
Secretary General  
International Council of Aircraft Owner and Pilot Associations

8 May 2024

### **Vice President's Report – IAOPA Africa/Middle East Region**

The Africa/Middle East Region has long been the weakest of all the IAOPA regions with regard to general aviation. This has largely been due to political instabilities, armed conflicts, corruption, economic factors and a general suspicion of those who may pursue the freedoms of private aviation, either recreationally or as transport for personal purposes or as an adjunct to their businesses or professions.

South Africa enjoyed the position of having the strongest general aviation sector within the region over many decades and exhibited a great deal of growth in the non type-certified (experimental) segment in the last two decades. However, in the last five years this has stalled somewhat, partly attributable to the Covid pandemic and consequent economic decline, as well as the decline of national currencies over much of the region. To put this into a little perspective, when I first began visiting the USA in the early 1980s, one South African Rand would buy me around US \$1.30. Today, that same Rand buys me a mere 5 US cents.

Since aircraft and aircraft parts are largely dollar-based, this has had an enormous impact on aircraft owners and pilots. This is even more so in the entire Africa/Middle East Region, with very few exceptions. A subjective estimation is that in the last five years, approximately 50% of all South African-registered type-certified GA aircraft have been exported. I say subjective, since our civil aviation authority, citing privacy laws, no longer publishes its aircraft register. More alarmingly, many of the 54 states in the region do not maintain aircraft registers at all.

However in recent times, the intrusion of politics, both national and international, is becoming a very significant factor in the decline of general aviation in the region. The conflict in the Middle East and also in Ukraine is behind much of the re-alignment of states along partisan lines. Picking sides in these conflicts sees many nations jockeying for influence at the United Nations and its several affiliated bodies. Worldwide burgeoning identity politics exacerbates this trend.

While AOPA South Africa and IAOPA is pointedly apolitical and confines its functions to the development and protection of general aviation across the region, it cannot be blind to the effects of economic and political factors, which have led to increased corruption, rent-seeking and the imposition of legislative, regulatory and other restrictions upon GA, not only by governments, but within the aviation industry itself.

Sadly, opposition to restrictive measures against GA is increasingly perceived as being political opposition. Additionally, IAOPA's relationship with ICAO is also perceived as having an "inside track" with an international body. Being seen to be compliant with the Convention is of enormous importance to the contracting states within the region. On the other hand, AOPA's and IAOPA's efforts in developing regulations have a distressing tendency to uncover grave failures to implement international standards. This creates a perception of AOPA South Africa being a potential or actual whistleblower on an international stage – when nothing could be further from the truth. We have no interest in undermining our own countries, yet compliance with international standards are of crucial importance. Nevertheless, these perceptions have caused a great deal of hostility toward AOPA South Africa, to the extent that it may even compromise our personal safety and reputations.

This is a significant reason why we have elected to sit out this World Assembly and instead pursue our objectives of informing and assisting our members and the wider general aviation community in what are very trying times. We have adopted something of a watch and wait approach at this time, also taking into account that national elections are held in South Africa at the end of this month. It is projected by pollsters that the party that has held an outright majority in South Africa for the last 30 years will lose that majority by a significant margin, thus creating a great deal of uncertainty in the immediate future. We fervently hope that the intrusion of politics into general aviation will become a distant memory.

I have personally made many friends and learned much by having attended every World Assembly since 2012, which has benefited not only myself but also the greater GA community. It grieves us at AOPA South Africa that we are not attending this great event, particularly taking into account the long hiatus since the event graciously hosted by AOPA New Zealand in 2018. We thank you all for your friendship and support over these many years, but rest assured – we'll be back!

A couple of special mentions: we were deeply saddened by the passing of Haraldur Diego of AOPA Iceland. He was a great friend and mentor and will be remembered with great fondness.

A great thanks to Frank Hofmann for his regular reports on the activities at ICAO. These have been invaluable in assisting us in our understanding and efforts.

We wish all the delegates at this Assembly a pleasant and constructive few days – we wish we were there to share it!

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Martinus', written over a light blue rectangular background.

Chris Martinus  
President  
Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association – South Africa

