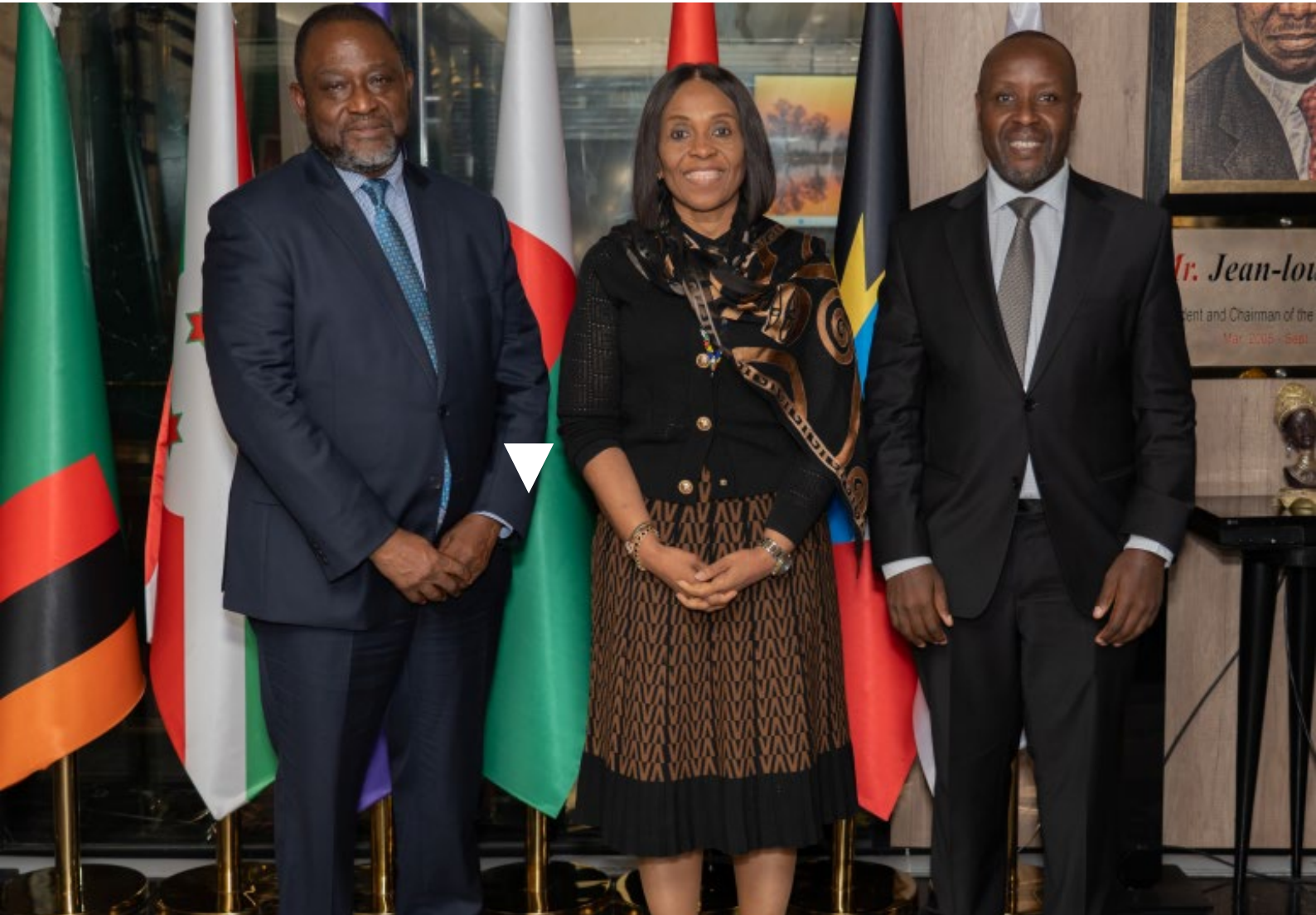


# AFRAA Marks New Era of African Aviation as Free Route Airspace Takes Flight in West and Central Africa



Transforming Africa's Trade

African Export-Import Bank  
Banque Africaine d'Import-Export



Nairobi, Kenya – November 2025: – The African Airlines Association (AFRAA) heralds a transformative milestone in African aviation with the full operational deployment of Free Route Airspace (FRA) in the Western and Central Africa (WACAF) region, effective 30 October 2025. This landmark achievement,

## Espace aérien à routes libres (FRA) : une réalité désormais en Afrique de l'Ouest et Centrale (WACAF)

L'Association des Compagnies Aériennes Africaines (AFRAA) annonce la mise en œuvre opéra-

tioning from successful trials initiated in November 2023, will allow any airline to plan and fly more direct User Preferred Routes (UPRs), significantly enhancing the efficiency and sustainability of air travel across the continent. UPRs allow airlines to fly the most fuel-efficient and timely paths based on current conditions, rather than having to follow fixed,



conventional routes, giving the pilots more flexibility and enabling them to adjust to factors like weather and winds, leading to reduced fuel consumption, shorter flight times and lower carbon emissions.

African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) has supported the FRA initiative since the trials begun in 2023, in accordance with its Memorandum of Understanding with AFRAA and in line with the Global Air Navigation Plan of the International Civil Aviation Organisation and the conclusions of the Africa-India (AFI) FRA Planning and Implementation Regional Group.

The deployment of the FRA represents a decisive step resulting from a collaborative effort between air operators and air navigation service providers (ANSPs) who reached a consensus at a joint workshop in Dakar, Senegal to conclude the trial phase and move to full implementation.

*“The implementation of Free Route Airspace in the WACAF region is a game-changer for African aviation,”* said Mr. Abdérahmane Berthé, AFRAA Secretary General. *“This is a testament to what we can achieve through collaboration. By cutting flight times and fuel consumption, we are not only boosting the competitiveness and profitability of our airlines but also making a significant commitment to environmental sustainability.”*

*We extend our profound gratitude to Afreximbank and all stakeholders who have journeyed with us for their unwavering commitment to this vision: the Western and Central African Air Navigation Service Providers (ANSPs), Agence pour la Sécurité de la Navigation Aérienne en Afrique et à Madagascar (ASECNA), Ghana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA),*

*tionnelle complète de l’Espace aérien à routes libres (Free Route Airspace – FRA) dans la région Afrique de l’Ouest et Centrale (WACAF), effective depuis le 30 octobre 2025. Cette avancée majeure fait suite aux essais concluants lancés en novembre 2023.*

Le FRA permet aux compagnies aériennes de planifier et d’exploiter des routes préférentielles plus directes, adaptées aux conditions opérationnelles et météorologiques, en remplacement des itinéraires fixes traditionnels. Cette flexibilité accrue se traduit par des gains significatifs en efficacité opérationnelle, une réduction des temps de vol, de la consommation de carburant, des coûts d’exploitation et des émissions de CO<sub>2</sub>.

Soutenue par Afreximbank et mise en œuvre grâce à une étroite collaboration entre les compagnies aériennes, les fournisseurs de services de navigation aérienne (ANSPs) et les organisations internationales, cette initiative marque une étape clé vers une aviation africaine plus compétitive, durable et intégrée.

Déjà adoptée par plusieurs grandes compagnies africaines, l’initiative est désormais ouverte à l’ensemble des opérateurs aériens dans l’espace WACAF, ouvrant la voie à une extension progressive du FRA à l’échelle du continent à partir de 2026.

*Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA), Régie des Voies Aériennes (RVA), Roberts Flight Information Region (Roberts FIR), The International Air Transport Association (IATA), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the Civil Air Navigation Services Organization (CANSO.”*

While commenting on the FRA initiative, Mrs. Kanayo Awani, Executive Vice President, Intra-African Trade and Export Development, Afreximbank, said: “Efficient, safe, and well-regulated air services are critical to facilitating intra-African trade, tourism and connectivity in line with the objectives of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Afreximbank is fully committed to supporting the full implementation of SAATM and the establishment of an effective and efficient aviation industry through a range of financing instruments, including its aircraft leasing platform as well as trade facilitation interventions.

Substantial Benefits for Launch Airlines In a powerful demonstration of the initiative’s potential, six leading African airlines including Ethiopian Airlines, Kenya Airways, EGYPTAIR, Royal Air Maroc, RwandAir and ASKY Airlines were granted approval for UPRs, connecting 30 key city pairs.

The shift to UPRs is expected to generate significant annual returns to participating airlines including over 1,393 hours of cumulative flight time saved, cutting 5,000 metric tonnes of fuel burn and therefore avoiding some 16,000 metric tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and a reduction in annual fuel costs of about US\$ 15 million.



## **A Free Route Airspace for all**

Crucially, the WACAF airspace is now open for free routes. Starting 30 October 2025, any airline can plan and operate User Preferred Routes. The region's ANSPs have committed to approving newly requested UPR within 48 hours.

Furthermore, following final administrative work by the 24 WACAF States, this process will be further streamlined, with approvals no longer required for new UPR requests from mid-2026.

## **A Continent-wide Vision for the Future**

The success in WACAF paves the way for the next phase of continental integration. The focus for 2026 will shift to the Eastern and Southern Africa (ESAF) airspace to conclude trials and achieve a similar FRA implementation.

The region is also committed to developing a web-based coordination platform to streamline operations for airlines and ANSPs.



The Free Route initiative is a transformative step for aviation in our region. Its operational and environmental benefits are not just incremental; they are a game-changer for ASKY, empowering us to serve the West African community with unprecedented efficiency and reliability. Our sincere commendation to AFRAA and all African Union bodies for their pioneering leadership. This is precisely the kind of collaboration that moves our entire industry forward.

**Mr. Esayas W. HAILU,**  
CEO Compagnie Aérienne ASKY

Better Skies for Africa



This visionary Free Route Airspace initiative is a triple win—slashing our operational costs, significantly reducing our environmental footprint, and enhancing connectivity across Africa. We commend AFRAA for its pivotal leadership in uniting the industry toward a more efficient and sustainable future and look forward to expand the initiative to other regions in Africa.”

**Mr. Mesfin Tasew,**  
Group CEO of Ethiopian Airlines

Better Skies for Africa



EgyptAir celebrates this historic achievement, which will yield substantial efficiencies and environmental benefits, strengthening our network across West and Central Africa. We appreciate AFRAA for its instrumental role in turning this vision into a reality for all African carriers.”

**Capt Ahmed Adel,**  
Chairman, EgyptAir Holding Company

Better Skies for Africa



This is a defining moment for African aviation, where collaboration directly fuels efficiency and sustainability, allowing RwandAir to operate more competitively and responsibly. We are proud to have been part of this journey and commend AFRAA for its outstanding leadership in making it a success.”

**Ms. Yvonne Makolo,**  
CEO of RwandAir

Better Skies for Africa



Adopting Free Route Airspace marks a new era of operational excellence and sustainability, delivering crucial savings and a reduced carbon footprint for our operations. Royal Air Maroc applauds AFRAA for its relentless efforts in driving this continent-wide transformation.”

**Mr. Abdelhamid Addou,**  
Chairman & CEO of Royal Air Maroc

Better Skies for Africa



The implementation of Free Route is a monumental leap for African aviation, directly translating into major fuel and cost savings for Kenya Airways while underscoring our commitment to greener skies. Our commendations to AFRAA for championing this collaborative success that benefits both airlines and the planet.”

**Mr. Allan Kilavuka,**  
Former CEO of Kenya Airways and Chairman AFRAA Executive Committee

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# Transforming Africa's Trade

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