

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AFRAA Calls on Governments to Cut Costs and Unlock Financing as Africa's Airlines Face Record Demand

African carriers project a margin of just 1.3% in 2026 even as passenger traffic grows 21.5% and air travel penetration remains at only 7% of the population

Nairobi, Kenya, 10 September 2026 — The African Airlines Association (AFRAA) today called on governments, regional institutions and financing partners to strengthen support for Africa's airlines, at a hybrid media roundtable held at the Sarit Expo Centre in Nairobi under the theme “Resilient African Aviation: Partnerships, Empowerment, Profitability.” AFRAA, whose 50 member airlines carry over 85% of international traffic among African carriers, is pressing for coordinated action to help airlines convert rising travel demand into sustainable growth and withstand external shocks such as conflict-driven airspace closures and fuel price volatility.

Africa's population reached 1.58 billion in 2026, with a median age of 19, and the continent's economies are growing at 4.3% annually, yet air travel penetration remains at just 7% of the population, among the lowest of any region. Passenger traffic is projected to reach 137.3 million in 2026, up 21.5% on 2025, but African carriers are expected to earn a margin of only 0.2%, among the thinnest of any world region, as capacity growth continues to outstrip demand growth.

Taxes, fees and charges make up 35–40% of African ticket prices, against roughly 20% globally, and governments are holding an estimated \$774 million in blocked airline funds as of March 2026, the largest share held by any region. Africa also receives just 2.0% of global aircraft deliveries, compared with 35.6% for Asia Pacific and 24.0% for Europe, even as the continent needs an estimated \$25–30 billion in airport and air navigation infrastructure over the next decade. Conflict-driven airspace closures across the Sahel, including a roughly 4,000km no-fly corridor spanning Niger, Mali, Sudan and Libya, are forcing costly reroutings that add fuel burn and operating cost to already thin margins.

“African aviation is ready to deliver on its promise to connect our economies, move our trade, and carry the growth that this continent's youth and enterprise are already generating. But readiness is not the same as capacity. Our airlines are being asked to carry that promise on some of the thinnest margins in the world, while absorbing costs, blocked funds and shocks that carriers elsewhere simply do not face. We are calling on governments to release what is owed, to lower the tax burden on air travel, and to convert the liberalisation they have already signed up to into practice on the ground. We are equally grateful for the partnership of Afreximbank, the African Development Bank and the African Union Commission, whose engagement on financing and infrastructure gives us real momentum to build on. With that support matched at scale, African airlines can do what they do best: drive the growth, resilience and connectivity our continent needs,” said Mr. Berthé, Secretary General of AFRAA. Ni

The call builds on AFRAA's six-point response to strengthen African aviation: developing financing solutions for aircraft acquisition alongside Afreximbank, the African Development Bank and the AU Commission ahead of the July 2027 AU Summit; advancing the African Airlines Cooperation Framework to close a long-haul capacity gap in which African airlines hold just 37.6% of intercontinental capacity; pressing governments to convert their SAATM commitments into on-the-ground market liberalisation; and extending investment in safety, airspace efficiency and local maintenance capacity.

On safety, AFRAA's capacity-building work with the Flight Safety Foundation has supported a 35% improvement in Africa's 2025 accident rate, down to 7.86 accidents per million flights from 12.13 in 2024. Its Free Route Airspace programme, which has already saved an estimated 5,000 tonnes of fuel annually in West and Central Africa, is now being extended into Eastern and Southern Africa. AFRAA is also calling for investment to keep more of the \$1.8 billion African airlines currently spend on overseas aircraft maintenance on the continent instead.

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Notes to Editors

About AFRAA

The African Airlines Association (AFRAA) is the trade association of airlines from the member states of the African Union, founded in Accra, Ghana in 1968 and headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya. AFRAA's mission is to promote and serve African airlines and to champion the continent's aviation industry, representing airline interests before governments, regulators and international bodies. Its membership of 50 airlines spans the continent and includes all major intercontinental African operators, together carrying over 85% of international traffic among African carriers.

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