

Airports company blamed for impending downgrade

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by Ndanki Kahiurika



Dan Kamati

SHORTCOMINGS raised at the downgrade of the Hosea Kutako International Airport back in 2014 could lead to a second downgrade, while the airports company is being blamed for the failure.

This was revealed during a high-level meeting held on Tuesday afternoon between the Federation of Namibian Tourism Associations (Fenata), the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, government officials and Icao experts who are attached to the Namibia Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA).

Both the Namibia Airports Company (NAC) and Air Namibia were not present at the meeting, and questions sent to them were not responded to.

Dan Kamati, the airports company's spokesperson, denied that there could be a downgrade, saying the audit which will be carried out now is a security audit, and not a safety audit like what led to the downgrade back in 2014.

He said "the Airport Council International (ACI) Airport Excellence (APEX) programme in security that was held in December 2017 at the Hosea Kutako International Airport also brought out various issues which have since formed part of our holistic approach to addressing security matters at our flagship airport".

"There is no link between the upcoming ICAO security audit and the downgrade of any airport. A downgrade can only emanate from a safety audit, and in this case it is the sole responsibility of the Namibia Civil Aviation

Authority (NCAA) in its capacity as the designated civil aviation authority," he said.

Speaking to The Namibian earlier this week, Fenata chairperson Bernd Schneider, who had also issued a statement on the meeting outcomes on Wednesday, accused the airports company of inaction.

"The dire situation Namibia finds itself in can be fully blamed on the total lack of action over the years by the NAC," said Schneider.

He said the experts, some of whom have been in the country for years and were also blamed for the downgrade back in 2014, told the meeting that the Hosea Kutako International Airport (HKIA) will not meet the required safety standards.

"Many of the shortcomings have already been highlighted during the last audit three years ago, where the HKIA was downgraded due to concerns regarding airport fire-fighting capacities," said Schneider.

The airports company, which manages the airport, and the NCAA have been at loggerheads over the years. The two had also been called in by president Hage Geingob due to their infighting, where the airports company had complained about political pressure to award contracts.

Air Namibia's Xavier Masule, the general manager of commercial services at Air Namibia, said there would be a loss of revenue opportunities, litigation costs, and wide-scale business disruptions.

"The impact will also be felt by Namibian residents or citizens intending to fly internationally having to go by road to the nearest international airport in neighbouring countries to catch their flight," he stated.

Masule said currently, domestic flights account for less than 10% of all air passenger traffic