THE SENATE

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

NOTICE PAPER

NOTICE OF MOTION

BY

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MOTION OF URGENT NATIONAL IMPORTANCE BROUGHT UNDER ORDERS 41 AND 51 OF THE STANDING ORDERS

URGENT NEED TO ADDRESS THE DISTURBING ISSUE OF KEEPING AIRCRAFTS AIRBORNE IN HOLDING PATTERNS AT NIGERIAN AIRPORTS AS A RESULT OF VERY IMPORTANT PERSON (VIP) AND OTHER SECURITY-RELATED MOVEMENTS, AND THE ATTENDANT RISKS TO AVIATION SAFETY

The Senate:

Notes that the safety of passengers and aircraft crews is essential to the reliability and economic viability of air transport;

Further Notes that commercial air transport operates on a highly co-ordinated set of schedules covering aircraft departure and arrival slots, fuel planning, crew duty time limitations, passenger connections, airport operations and air traffic management, all of which require a very high degree of co-ordination between the various aviation authorities.

Observed that on some occasions, commercial aircrafts which are scheduled to land at some local airports have to remain in the air in holding patterns for quite a long time (in some cases reportedly for over an hour) as landing operations have been temporarily suspended to allow for the movement of VIPs or other security-related movements.

Further Observed that international flights scheduled to land at Nigerian airports often divert to alternative airports within the country when airspace or airport access is temporarily restricted at destination airports due to VIP movements, thereby conveniently avoiding risks associated with landing delays..

Mindful that the security and operational requirements which are associated with VIPs and other related security movements are legitimate and must be respected, but such requirements should be managed in such a way as not to place commercial aircrafts at avoidable aviation safety risks.

Worried that prolonged airborne holdings may result in significant fuel consumption and reduce the operational fuel reserves available to an aircraft, particularly where the holding period is extended beyond the time reasonably anticipated by the pilot and the airline;

Further worried that prolonged holding may expose aircraft to additional operational risks, including deteriorating weather conditions, air traffic congestion, reduced flexibility for diversion, crew duty-time constraints and the possibility of fuel-related emergencies, especially where several aircrafts are simultaneously awaiting clearance to land;

Aware that the decision to permit an aircraft to take off is ordinarily preceded by flight planning and coordination between the airline and relevant air traffic management authorities, and that information concerning foreseeable restrictions at the destination airport ought to inform decisions on departure clearance, sequencing and the management of arriving aircrafts;

Concerned that when relevant authorities are aware or should be aware that an airport will be temporarily unavailable for commercial arrivals due to a scheduled VIP movement or other security-related restrictions, permitting aircrafts to depart their origin airports without coordination may unnecessarily transfer the burden of managing that restriction to aircrafts already airborne;

Disturbed that in a situation where a restriction is foreseeable, it is safer and more operationally sensible to deal with it via ground delays, revised departure slots, and departure sequencing rather than simply have aircraft take off and then keep them airborne and await the resumption of landing operations.

Recognised that the Nigerian Civil Aviation Authority (NCAA), the Nigerian Airspace Management Agency (NAMA), the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), airlines and relevant security agencies have distinct but complementary responsibilities in ensuring aviation safety, air traffic management, airport operations and the security of protected persons and facilities;

Accordingly, the Senate resolves to:

1. Urge the NCAA, NAMA and FAAN to enforce operational procedures that require advance coordination and prompt notice of planned airspace restrictions to airlines, such that when restrictions are foreseeable, authorities must manage ground traffics at points of origin rather than allow take off.

2. Urge the Senate Committee on Aviation to interface NCAA, NAMA and FAAN to ensure strict adherence with and report back to the Senate within 2 weeks.