A NEW CARIBBEAN AIRLIFT ALLIANCE IS IN FORMATION IN THE REGION

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By Cdr. Bud Slabbaert

This was announced at last week's Caribbean Aviation Meetup in the Bahamas. The announcement was made by Rob Ceravolo, CEO of Tropic Ocean Airways and Cdr. Bud Slabbaert, the Chairman of the Caribbean Aviation Meetup, during the debriefing session of the conference. The attendees of the session unanimously agreed and offered their active support. The third person in the decision making was Vincent Verderpool-Wallace, former Minister of Tourism of the Bahamas and former CEO of the Caribbean Tourism Organisation, who is a strong and well-respected advocate for changes in Caribbean airlift and tourism matters. The Alliance in its current infant stage is a gathering of highly qualified professionals with industrial support that aims for improving airlift and progress in air transportation in the Caribbean.

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The Caribbean Airlift Alliance will be non-governmental, non-partisan and impartial. The Alliance should not be considered a new contender entering a boxing ring. Although the Alliance is a response to many airlift dilemmas in the Caribbean region, the emphasis will be on providing information, education, and furthering understanding among all stakeholders in airlift matters and eventually finding solutions. Although governments and their authorities may be seen as stakeholders, most of the governments in the region have been not part of solutions.

The Caribbean picture is that tourism represents upto 85% of the revenue of the islands territories. Governments may exercise the powers given to them by their constituencies. However, they should realize that such power means relative little in a more global perspective. The vacationers and passengers abroad have the full power to decide which destinations they prefer to visit and subsequently contribute to those economies. There are many choices and options within the region but also beyond. The airlines are in full power to decide what destinations they want to fly to. Those decisions are very much related to the passenger demand. They will always aim for a payload of 85%. So, what does political power mean when the guests and transportation operators needed for a healthy economy are preferring different destinations. The power of the governments may result in increased competition. Guess, who will be the winners with growing numbers of visitors and improved economy results?

The Alliance will appreciate the cooperation of any government. But the highly qualified professionals of the Alliance have the command over the necessary expertise and knowledge in the various fields related to airlift. Professionals are not typically prepared to spin their wheels. Therefore, governments and their agencies cooperating with the Alliance will experience the benefits of cooperation and getting positive results. The governments that will remain reserved are more or less on their own and may have chosen for isolation.

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The Alliance is not a typical industry organization that represent the interest of a particular membership base. Unfortunately, one must conclude that in many cases, the Caribbean is a stepchild when an organization represents, the Americas….. and the Caribbean, in small lettering as a must to be put somewhere. It is clear were the emphasis is, and logically little attention can be given to a region 20-30 relatively territories with many complex dilemmas.

The culture within the Alliance may be different from other originations. An activity may not start with setting up a committee trying to work from top to bottom. The Alliance will encourage individual initiatives by their professionals based on their expertise and knowledge. They will then receive the necessary support to move ahead. Thus, more a bottom to top perspective. The Alliance may create a Task Force on demand. Such request may come from a government or a private interest group. However, such Task Force will not be created for debating but rather have a clear objective and a plan of action. It may be a new different approach that is very much needed in the Caribbean region.

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