

The International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations



09 December 2015

Mr. Eliseu Padilha
Ministry of the Cabinet's Civil Aviation Secretariat
Edifício Parque Cidade Corporate - Torre C - 5o e 6o andares
Setor Comercial Sul - B (SCS-B), Quadra 9, Lote C
Brasília - DF - CEP 70.308.200
Brazil

Dear Minister

I am writing to you as the President of the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) concerning a situation in Brazilian Airspace that requires your attention.

IFALPA represents over 100,000 commercial airline pilots in 100 Member Associations around the world. IFALPA receives reports concerning operations at international airports and operations in international airspace.

At a recent meeting in Buenos Aires, Argentina, IFALPA was made aware of the launching of balloons across Brazil. We were informed that this is a common practice in Brazil originally used for cultural and religious festivals but now used in competitions with many organised groups involved. The competitions have prizes which involve large amounts of money and have become very popular. These balloons can be from 2-60 metres long, and in competitions often 100+ metres. They weigh over 2 tons in weight and often carry upto 300 kg of fireworks. They operate all through the year but there is a higher incidence between April and July. There have been reports of balloons being seen at FL 240 and some reports where at FL370 more than 50 ballons were observed at various levels below and some higher.

We were shown a video where one such balloon had landed on fire on the Apron of an airport and ground staff had to take significant actions to ensure it did not endanger the aircraft parked there. There have also been reports of these ballons operating very close the arrival and departure lanes of airports making operations very difficult to remain clear of the balloon but make a safe landing or departure.

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There have also been reported incidents where balloons made contact with aircraft in the air and where in more than one case the pitots became obstructed which caused unreliable air speed, loss of both auto pilots and loss of auto thrust.

IFALPA is aware that the launching of these balloons is illegal but that there are municipal laws within Brazil which actually approves them on the basis that this is a cultural activity.

While we appreciate this, we would call upon your good offices to reassess these approvals and indeed the whole situation which is causing a considerable risk to civil aviation operations.

IFALPA would wish for an all-out ban on this activity but realise this would not be practical and suggests that the activity could be carried out in specific areas at specific times thus enabling the airspace surrounding the area to be closed. In addition, NOTAMS need to be issued to ensure all operators are aware of the risk.

We hope that your office will be in a position to act on the information we have given you. However, if nothing is done to relieve this situation, IFALPA will have no option but to classify all Brazilian airspace as Critically Deficient, Black Star at its next Conference in New Orleans, USA in April 2016. We hope that this will not be necessary particularly with Brazil hosting the Olympics in 2016.

On behalf of the Federation I strongly urge you to implement the improvements required to rectify this situation to ensure the airspace does not become critically deficient. In that regard, IFALPA is prepared and most willing to co-operate with your Administration in any way possible to ensure that a mutually acceptable solution is reached to address the problem.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in brown ink, appearing to read 'M. Chalk', is positioned below the text 'Yours faithfully'.

Captain Martin Chalk
President

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