



IFALPA LOOKS FOR MIDDLE EAST CONNECTIONS

News / Airlines



The International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (**IFALPA**), the Montreal-based 'Global Voice of Pilots' says it's looking to secure ties with **Middle East** carriers but admits it's got work to do to overcome "prevailing misconceptions" of its purpose.

IFALPA's President, Captain Martin Chalk, has been on a 'fact-finding' visit to the region reaching out to carriers to dispel preconceived notions of any union-creation agenda and laying out a joint approach to a road map focussed more on mutual safety and technical development. The task is, the Captain admits, something of a steep incline.

“There are long-held assumptions that associations are simply there for union-style support to members but this is old hat. The majority of our member associations are professional associations focused on safety and technical development and provide independent advice and support where pilots may see challenges. There are some that have a trade-union-like element but by no means all and these we know would not fit the culture of the Middle East,” said Capt. Chalk.

The IFALPA President, whose organisation represents 100,000 pilots and flight engineers in over 100 countries, knows he’s facing a long game in convincing Middle East airlines to work with his organisation, he admits, too that it could be something of a game-changer for his own organisation.

“We have to find a way to interact with Gulf airlines so that their approach and concerns are included in our deliberations. But for sure we will have to change and it will require us to get over preconceptions and prove we are more than just a workers’ organisation because that’s not the case at all. In the same way that we have no remit, nor do we seek any role, in any of our members’ negotiations; nor would there be any desire for such activity on IFALPA’s part here.

“At this stage I’m very much in listening mode. Before we even attempt to solve the problem, I need to collect as much data as possible. The solution will inevitably include how we might create an informal contact which will involve developing understanding and trust which can then be turned into a formal development further down the road.”

Capt. Chalk says currently many pilots within Middle East airlines do belong to professional pilots associations but prefer to keep their membership quiet. “We do have members in the Gulf airlines but they are members within their ‘home’ organisations and do not want to make a big song and dance about it,” he said.

Talking the Middle East airlines round will be no mean feat – but Capt. Chalk said there is plenty in it for the carriers with IFALPA’s stated mission being: “to be the global voice of professional pilots by providing representation, services and support to promote the highest level of aviation safety worldwide.”

“It is in the interests of improved safety,” he said. “We offer an additional channel through which to talk to IACO to ensure safety regulation is both effective and practical and not overloaded by bureaucracy. We have to find a sweet spot in the middle so that the passenger is more confident and doesn’t consider this as an issue when they choose to travel. Clearly this is not so much of an issue here in the Gulf because the carriers have a system that works – but we want to better understand it and ensure this continues for the long term.

“Secondly, the Middle East airlines have a challenge with pilot requirement over the next decade or two. With the current situation, pilots may not be attracted to work for them when they could work for others who are connected to the global professional pilots’ body. This doesn’t mean we intend to unionise the Middle East, I reiterate, we don’t want to interfere in domestic arrangements.”

Capt. Chalk says he is making some headway with carriers he prefers not to mention, with others, he says, he’s being stonewalled. “Some are talking to us – we don’t want to name them at the moment as discussions are at an early stage – others, well the response, considering we just want to talk and find mutual beneficial ground, is surprising.”

The IFALPA President however will be taking his ‘safety first’ message to the Global Aerospace Summit in Abu Dhabi next March when he’s part of a panel discussing: ‘Safety v efficiency: are we

going far enough to ensure safety?’ And, he’s looking to nurture Middle East links by holding more IFALPA events in the region – the Federation’s Accident Analysis and Prevention Committee Meeting was held in Abu Dhabi last year.

“We hope to organise an IFALPA Board Meeting in the region to which we would invite civil aviation authorities,” he says.

Ever the pragmatist, Capt. Chalk accepts he’s in for a long game. “I recognise it’s not going to happen overnight. But there has to be change at some time and we have to show that IFALPA’s interests have now broadened.”

14 NOVEMBER 2015

SOURCE: ARABIANAEROSPACE

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