

# Nigerian Ambassador to UAE Decries Lopsided Air Traffic Rights against Nigerian Carriers

**Chinedu Eze** in Dubai

The Nigerian Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Mr. Mohammed Rimi, has said there is a need for domestic airlines to reciprocate air traffic rights the Federal Government of Nigeria signed with other countries to ensure that Nigeria benefits from such agreements.

Rimi, who made this known during the corporate dinner to celebrate the inaugural flight of Air Peace to Dubai via Sharjah, stated that this is why the federal government is giving full support to the airline operations to UAE.

He urged the airline to be consistent and efficient in order to survive the competition in the ever-busy route, assuring them that if Air Peace is able to maintain its operations in the next six months, it would entrench itself in the market.

“Air Peace is now recognized as a flag carrier based on the BASA (Bilateral Air Service Agreement) and whatever the airline is doing will be linked to Nigeria. So the airline is representing Nigeria, therefore, it should do everything in accordance with diplomatic requirements. The only thing the government can do is to provide diplomatic and political support, as I also call on Nigerians to support this airline,” Rimi said.

Also, stakeholders in the aviation and financial sectors have expressed optimism that Air Peace would survive in the market and break the jinx that Nigerian carriers don't succeed in international operations.

They noted that Air Peace started its international operations by breaking the record with its load factor, which was over 80 percent filled with a return flight that was also well booked.

Speaking at the ceremony also, the General Manager of Fidelity Bank, Ken Okpara, said he was confident that the airline would sustain the new route because the Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Air Peace, Allen Onyema, has proven himself to be a disciplined, passionate and determined entrepreneur, and this is why Fidelity bank is strongly behind the project.

According to Okpara, "For us at Fidelity Bank, we are quite excited because we have seen a very committed, passionate professional and shrewd entrepreneur in the person of Onyema, who is spearheading the Air Peace vision. We have also seen a dream come true. This is a function of the fact that if you believe strongly and you have a vision, with the right structure, you will be able to achieve whatever you are committed to. History is being made today.

"The partnership Air Peace has with Fidelity Bank is an enduring one. It is not just a bank-customer relationship. It has been there from the beginning, and what is clear is that it is associated with the way the bank has been doing things over the years. We ensure the institution puts the right kind of structure in place. Beyond funding is the fact that we have been involved in advisory services, hand-holding and providing guidance."

He explained further that the aviation sector requires a high capital outlay but sadly, a lot of the airlines have closed shop, adding that Air Peace has kept growing because it has the right structures, funding, and equipment.

“For us as a bank, it is about helping Air Peace to put the right kind of structure that will enable them not only remain sustainable in business but excel. We provide them the right kind of funding and put the right infrastructure in place. So, it is a total relationship which is in the long term,” Okpara added.

On his own, Onyema stressed that if Air Peace must succeed on the Dubai route, the Nigerian Government must support it, as the airline cannot do it alone.

“We can only do our best but the rest lies with the government. The government must stop unfair competition in this sector. The United States Government did it when the Gulf carriers swooped on them. The policy of multiple designations and multiple frequencies for foreign carriers are detrimental to our economy.

“Nigerian airlines will not grow under such a policy. The government must help us grow the sector and not stifle it, but I know President Muhammadu Buhari is a nationalist who is ready to support Nigerian carriers. Aviation is a very tough business, so I plead with Nigerians and the government to support Air Peace. We promise to give Nigerians modern equipment and unparalleled services,” he said.

Country Manager of Air Peace in UAE, Reham Mustafa, expressed happiness that the plans to create jobs for the people have become a reality, pledging the airline’s unwavering and quality services.

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