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How Much Lift Can Africa Gain From AJW's MRO Support?

Hafsa Abdulsalam is the Regional Sales Director, Africa, for AJ Walter Group. Amidst the unfolding matrix of growth and challenges in aviation in Africa, she reveals some interesting issues in Africa's MRO industry. She speaks also on how AJW Group fits into the solutions in Africa's changing MRO landscape, in this exclusive interview with Aviation & Allied Business.

Q: How would you describe the African MRO Market today?

A: AJW would describe MRO in Africa as still being in a gestation stage, and there is currently limited in-continent infrastructure to support the aviation MRO aftermarket.

As you may know, MRO services include aircraft, engine and component maintenance, and looking from north to south of the continent there are only 3 to 4 MROs that can lay claim to this status - to being fully-fledged and able to perform all functions of an MRO as noted above. There are still a number of capability gaps on the continent and therefore there is a need to build MRO

capacity if the region is to be self-supporting.

With Africa's airlines subject to a complex regulatory framework, there is a lot of work still to be done on the continent for MRO providers.

Q: There are calls for more MRO facilities to be set up in Africa, especially West Africa. Do you think this is necessary?

A: Keeping aircraft airworthy through regular efficient and effective maintenance, repair and overhaul is a critical task for airlines. Whilst some African airlines, such as Kenya Airways, South African, Egypt Air, Tunis Air, Ethiopian Airlines to name a few have

their own well-established in-house maintenance facilities, many others are unable to service their needs and look to third parties for support. Efficiencies can be gained by choosing a provider who is able to manage all MRO requirements, either through a network of MRO providers and/or with their own MRO facility. By choosing a provider, such as AJW, airlines are able to benefit from efficiencies and cost reduction by leveraging AJW's repair volumes. Additionally, by having its own state-of-the-art MRO facility, AJW Technique, AJW has control over and can also guarantee the quality of repairs with flexible commercial terms as well as fast turnaround times. This combination enables AJW to support its customers and maximise the time-on-wing, thus improving the airline's fleet reliability and reducing total cost of ownership.

On the other hand, if MROs are to be established in-continent, they should be set up based on regional requirements. In West Africa, for example, there are no certified aircraft maintenance facilities able to perform maintenance up to C check level other than Aerocontractors for the Q400 and B737CL and AJW is proud to be partnering with them on this project. With the continent's fleet currently at approximately 1,300, an additional MRO facility would certainly boost the continent's MRO capabilities in addition to benefitting the wider economy in the creation of jobs.

Q: What new interventions and value addition is AJW bringing to Africa vis-a-vis the projected growth in aviation in the region?

A: AJW Group is a world-leading independent specialist in the supply, exchange, repair and lease of airframe and engine spare parts with almost 4,000 commercial and business aircraft under contract.

With customers in more than 117 countries worldwide, we have full service product support for 69% of all commercial aircraft globally that are flying today. We have a huge inventory, together with a network of MRO's and our own extensive component repair and overhaul capability based in Montreal.

AJW currently partners with airlines operating over 70% of Africa's fleet and our ethos is constantly focused on bringing about improvements and efficiencies to the airlines we work with.



Q: Cost of aircraft maintenance is still a challenge for most African airlines given their real financial state. What can AJW do to support these airlines?

A: Africa continues to witness upgrades, refurbishments, conversions and change of aircraft which require MRO facilities to service the requirements and drive down the cost of maintenance. As the volume of aircraft looks to increase on the continent by a further 1,000 in the next 20 years - looking at Airbus and Boeing Global Market Forecasts 2017 - there is a definite need to increase maintenance capacity. AJW can support airlines by allowing them to gain greater economies of scale and purchasing power. This is achieved as AJW supports large portfolios of fleets across the globe, as well as having the expertise and infrastructure to manage entire supply chains effectively. By outsourcing, airlines can reduce and streamline their own vendor management, whilst minimising the cost of MRO.

Q: Aviation safety has improved tremendously in Africa. In what ways can this be sustained as traffic and demand for more aircraft and air travel rise?

A: Improving safety standards in the continent is one step towards opening up air travel, and airlines must ensure that they continue to run their operations in accordance with regulatory authorities.

Safety can only be improved by proper and cost-effective maintenance and by ensuring that fleets are maintained to the highest standards. By partnering with AJW, airlines can be assured that they will be working with a company that aligns itself with their KPIs and goals along with the expertise and longevity where safety is of paramount importance. AJW's in-house MRO, AJW Technique, offers a wide range of global component repair approvals including FAA/TCCA, EASA, DGCA, ANAX, CAAS, CAAC and HKCAD.

Q: What do you look to in 2018 for AJW in Africa?

A: Africa accounts for 5.5% of the global commercial airline fleet, looking again at Airbus Global Market Forecast 2017.

The continued deregulation by the Governments within the African continent and the launch of the new pan-African biometric passports at the beginning of 2018 alongside the forecasted increase in single-aisle aircraft deliveries, the propensity in air travel is anticipated to rise. This will result in an anticipated

growth in MRO, especially in the single-aisle aircraft. By listening to and understanding customer challenges, and by developing mutually beneficial partnerships, AJW strives to continue to transform operational efficiency for airlines in the region and beyond.

Q: What challenges do you see in the African market and what makes the market attractive to you?

A: Africa has the potential to become one of the fastest-growing regions. Boeing's Current Market Outlook for 2016-35 projects that air traffic to, from and within Africa is expected to grow at about 6% annually over the next 20 years, making the market attractive - with a forecast of more than 1,000 new aircraft in that time.

That said, there are many challenges within the continent - including its complex regulatory framework, with many states failing to agree on the implementation of the Yamoussoukro Declaration. There is also the need for educating airlines on the advantages and potential cost savings of transitioning from an in-house MRO service to using a third party. By doing this and consolidating their spend, they stand to benefit from volume transactions and rebate schemes of which AJW has successfully championed on the continent. ■

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Q: What are the key challenges you have encountered in the process of making the AFI Plan work for Africa?

A: The main challenge was the political commitment of States. We all know that we have conflictual priorities in Africa but still aviation safety is paramount. The President of the ICAO Council and the Secretary General of ICAO have played an important role by seizing the opportunities of their high-level missions in Africa or during official audiences to sensitize States on the importance of safety and security in civil aviation. The progress is very successful in some States, but we still have slow progress in others. The second main challenge is the insufficient number of qualified personnel in many of the Civil Aviation Authorities (CAAs). But now there is really an encouraging progress

because training is becoming a key in many CAAs. The African experts attend all the activities conducted by AFI Plan and other training sessions and various meetings organized by ICAO and our international partners. However, the challenge for the CAAs is how to motivate and retain these qualified and competent experts in their Administration.

Q: What is your view on the recent adoption of the Abuja Declaration on the Development of Aviation Infrastructure in Africa and how does the AFI Plan align with it?

A: Civil aviation is a system with many linked components. The Declaration and Plan of Action for Development of Aviation Infrastructure in Africa is the missing one. We already had the Abuja Declaration on Aviation Safety in Africa and safety targets adopted on 20 July 2012 at the Ministerial Conference on Aviation Safety in

Africa, in Abuja, Nigeria and endorsed at the Twentieth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 28 January 2013. There are two other plans on Security and Facilitation, and a program on Human Resource Development Fund.

All these plans and programs aim to develop civil aviation in Africa and improve air transport and connectivity in Africa. Adequate aviation infrastructure, safety, aviation security and facilitation, promotion of tourism, qualified human resources are all interconnected to assure the sound implementation of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) that was adopted at the Twenty-Fourth Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the AU, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 31 January 2015, as a flagship project under the AU Agenda 2063. ■