

The International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations



22 April 2016

Minister Guilherme Ramalho
Ministry of the Cabinet's Civil Aviation Secretariat
Edificio 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 Ramalho

I am writing to you as the President of the International Federation of Air Line Pilots' Associations (IFALPA) concerning the continuing threat to civil aviation in Brazilian airspace from large unmanned balloons.

IFALPA represents over 100,000 commercial airline pilots in more than 100 countries around the world. In December 2015, IFALPA wrote to your office raising serious concerns about the launching of balloons across Brazil. We are informed that this is a common occurrence, originally practiced during cultural and religious festivals, but now spreading to organized competitions with many groups involved all across the country. The competitions can have prizes which involve large amounts of money and have become very popular. These balloons can be from 2-60 metres long, with some exceeding 100 metres in length. They can weigh over 2 tonnes and often carry hundreds of kilograms of fireworks and other flammable materials. They operate throughout the year but there is a higher incidence between April and July. We have been provided with photographs and video of balloons in close proximity to airline traffic at cruising levels. Flight crews have reported many sightings including one at FL370 where more than 50 balloons were observed at various levels both below, level with, and above the passenger airliner.

We have been sent video evidence of one balloon which landed, on fire, on the apron of an airport near the passenger terminal and aircraft parked thereon. Only the swift action of ground staff prevented damage to the aircraft and terminal. There have also been reports of balloons operating very close to, and within, the arrival and departure lanes of major airports making safe operations very difficult. Balloons have made contact with aircraft in the air and in more than one case, obstructed flight instrument sensors causing unreliable air speed and thrust indications, loss of autopilot functions and endangering the aircraft.

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IFALPA believes the Brazilian Authorities must immediately enforce laws banning these dangerous activities. Regulations and effective enforcement action must restrict the activity to specific areas at specific times, thus enabling the airspace surrounding the area to be closed to aircraft. In addition, NOTAMS must be issued immediately to ensure all operators are aware of the risk.

In our previous letter, we informed you that if effective action was not taken, we would have no option but to classify all Brazilian airspace as Critically Deficient, Black Star at our Conference. The Conference has been held and I regret to inform you that all Brazilian airspace is now classified as Critically Deficient, Black Star.

On behalf of the Federation I strongly urge you to act now to rectify this situation. 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 this serious safety threat. However, if you fail to act promptly we will have an obligation to ensure that the flying public is aware of the dangers these balloons pose as they consider traveling to the Olympics.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. Chalk', is positioned below the closing text.

Captain Martin Chalk
President

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