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Dr. Todd Curtis of The AirSafe.com Foundation Discusses Implications of the Recent Banning of 96 Airlines by the European Union

Seattle, WA – March 24, 2006 -- On March 22, 2006, the European Union published a list of 96 airlines that are either banned from operating in the European Union, or that have had their air operations severely limited. This airline blacklist is a more comprehensive version of blacklists published by individual European Union countries over the past several months.

All but three of these airlines are subject to a total ban which prevents that airline from operating into or out of any nation of the European Union, and even prevents overflights of the European Union by these airlines.

Of the 93 banned airlines, all but nine are from the following five countries:

- Democratic Republic of the Congo
- Equatorial Guinea
- Liberia
- Sierra Leone
- Swaziland

The other nine are from seven other countries:

- Air Koryo (North Korea)
- Air Services (Comoros)
- Ariana Afghan Airlines (Afghanistan)
- BGB Air and GST Aero (Kazakhstan)
- Phoenix Aviation and Reem Air (Kirghizstan)
- Phuket Airlines (Thailand)
- Silverbeck Cargo (Rwanda)

The three airlines that are allowed limited service to the European Union are Air Bangladesh with one banned 747, Buraq Air of Libya with two banned aircraft, and Hewa Bora Airways of the Democratic Republic of the Congo with a single aircraft allowed to operate in the European Union.

One question that many air travelers would ask is whether the banning of these airlines will have any significant effect on them. The answer to that question is no. One reason is that the ban affects flights to and from European Union countries and has no effect on the domestic operations of these airlines or on international operations that do not involve the European Union. Also, a passenger may be able to make a reservation and complete a flight to or from the European Union on one of the banned airlines if that airline arranges that flight to be operated by an airline that is not banned.

Another reason that these restrictions will not have much of an effect is because air travelers are unlikely to have a reason to fly on any of these airlines. Of the ten countries with banned airlines, Thailand is the only one with significant leisure and business travel to and from the European Union, and in the case of the one banned Thai airline, Air Phuket, there are a number of alternatives. It also happens that Air Phuket is scheduled for an audit by the European Union, and may soon exit this blacklist. Travel between any of the other nine countries and the European Union is also possible using airlines that do not have restrictions.

Another question that a traveler may have is whether this ban indicates that a flight on one of these airline is too high of a risk. Of the 96 total banned or restricted airlines, only nine were banned or restricted because of deficiencies in the airline, with seven of those nine from the five countries that had all of their airlines banned by the European Union. 84 of the 96 were banned because the European Union found that the national aviation authorities of the home countries of those 84 airlines either lacked sufficient oversight and control of these airlines or because those national authorities did not cooperate with the assessment process.

Given the current stature of the banned airlines, the effect on the traveling public of this blacklist is minimal. The European Union has taken a positive step in banning these airlines, but they have not provided the traveling public with a way to evaluate the airlines that can still serve the European Union. This approach is no different than that currently taken by the FAA in U.S. and by other national aviation authorities in that airlines may be banned from flying, but the public is not at the same time provided with the means to judge the airlines that remain. Without further action in this direction, the banning of these airlines by the European Union, and similar bans throughout the world, though helpful to some extent, will be more symbol than substance.

The AirSafe.com Foundation is a nonprofit educational charity that provides critical information about issues of aviation safety and aviation security. The president of the Foundation, Dr. Todd Curtis, a noted aviation safety expert and author of the 2000 book “Understanding Aviation Safety Data,” first launched the web site AirSafe.com in 1996. The Foundation also produces the podcast The Conversation at AirSafe.com and the latest podcast concerning this subject is now available on the Foundation’s web site at <http://podcast.airsafe.org/>. A detailed listing of the banned airlines is also available from the AirSafe.com Foundation web site at http://www.airsafe.org/podcasts/eu_blacklist.pdf.

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