



Regional organisation legally recognised by Récépissé Folio n°5452 of 26/04/2018
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CONCEPT NOTE

**Under the High Patronage and Leadership of His Excellency
Mr Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé, President of the Republic of Togo
and MUTAA Champion**

UAC is organising :

THE 2nd PANAFRICAN FORUM ON CONSUMER PROTECTION

Under the theme: 'Enhancing the satisfaction of users of air transport and telecommunications services for better air and digital connectivity'.

From September 5th to 7th, 2024

Lomé - TOGO

I. WHY THIS FORUM

The Pan-African Forum is a unique opportunity for the continent's consumer organisations and other stakeholders in the consumer protection ecosystem to discuss the major consumer issues and challenges facing the continent. It is a framework for reflection, exchange, capacity-building and networking in the search for appropriate and sustainable solutions to major consumer issues.

The onset of major crises (health, economic) is often seen as an opportunity for decision-makers, the private sector and populations to overcome structural obstacles, reinvent themselves and redefine strategies to create the conditions for a more prosperous, equitable and resilient integrated Africa. This is an opportunity for consumer organisations to play their part in consolidating what has already been achieved, and to support governments in achieving the African integration so long awaited by the people of Africa.

II. BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

The African continent is facing a number of challenges, including the economic, climate and food crises, poverty, youth unemployment, inequality and the growing political and security instability, all of which have an impact on the living conditions of consumers and on the region's economies. Helping to meet these challenges from a consumer perspective is one of the UAC's priorities. While the Forum will address the major consumer issues of the day, the emphasis will be on two sectors around which the debates and discussions will focus.

The first aspect on which the debates will focus is the air transport sector. Today, air transport, like other modes of surface transport, supports the economic production of States and is an effective instrument for the integration and opening up of countries, both internally and externally. Air transport plays a fundamental role in Africa's socio-economic development. The sector is a catalyst for promoting tourism and stimulating trade and regional development. However, Africa accounts for less than 3% of world air traffic. Consumers of air transport are faced with multiple connectivity problems for both people and goods. The causes are manifold. These include: i) the poor perception of air transport as a means of transport for the wealthy, rather than as a strategic sector and a lever for economic and social development; ii) the tax and para-tax burden on consumers; iii) regulatory constraints, particularly the limited granting of the 5th sky; iv) the absence of competition. All these factors, which are not exhaustive, contribute to an increase in the cost of air tickets, poor service within countries and a failure to meet consumers' needs and expectations. However, under the auspices of the African Union, the continent is making remarkable progress, reflected in strong, unifying commitments to regional integration and to addressing certain consumer concerns. This is the case of the Single African Air Transport Market (**SAATM**) created in 2018 for this purpose, which is also one of the flagship projects of the AU's Agenda 2063. It is seen as a crucial logistical infrastructure and facilitator for the smooth functioning of the FTAA, complemented by the Protocol on the Free Movement of Persons and Goods and the African Passport. It is encouraging to note that to date and under the leadership of the SAATM Champion, His Excellency, **President Faure Essozimna Gnassingbé**, 35 African countries have signed the solemn commitment to the **SAATM** and that efforts are continuing to get all countries on the continent to sign the commitment. The second aspect concerns the telecommunications sector. Given that this sector is booming across the continent, a number of challenges are currently facing the regulatory authorities and consumer organisations. These include the quality of services offered by telecoms operators and service providers, fair and transparent pricing, the management of consumer complaints, consumer information and education, the protection of personal data, the involvement of consumer organisations in regulation, and so on.

In view of these arguments, the African Consumers' Union (AUC) is organising a Pan-African consumer forum on the general theme: *“Enhancing user satisfaction with telecommunications and air transport services for better air and digital connectivity”*.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM

General Objectives

The aim of this Forum is to remobilise UAC members to identify effective strategies at national and continental level to help speed up the effective implementation of the Single African Air Transport Market (SAATM) and strengthen telecommunications regulation in Africa.

1. Specific Objectives

Specifically, it involves :

- ❖ Improve UAC members' knowledge of the SAATM and Telecommunications Regulation in order to better equip them to contribute to better air and digital connectivity on the continent;
- ❖ Identify and exchange challenges and effective strategies to strengthen the role of consumer organisations in the regulation of the telecommunications and air transport sectors on the continent;
- ❖ Strengthen collaboration with governments, African sub-regional and regional integration organisations, development partners, regulators and the business community on the need for citizen consumer involvement in the formulation and monitoring of the implementation of integration and development policies;
- ❖ Strengthen the capacities of consumer organisation leaders to enable them to positively influence policies that have an impact on the quality of life of today's and tomorrow's consumers;
- ❖ Strengthen solidarity and networking between consumer organisations within the UAC.

IV. PUBLIC TARGET

- ✓ African consumer organisations;
- ✓ Government representatives;
- ✓ The continent's civil aviation regulatory authorities;
- ✓ The continent's Telecommunications Regulatory Authorities;
- ✓ National, regional and international professional organisations;
- ✓ Regional and sub-regional integration organisations;
- ✓ International Organisations and NGO Partners;
- ✓ Think Tanks and
- ✓ Resource persons.

V. FORMAT OF THE FORUM

The Forum will take place in Lomé (Togo) in a face-to-face format over a period of three (3) days through the main panels, workshops and meetings with Experts as indicated below:

- High-Level Discussion Panels ;

- Workshops
- Training Sessions;
- Meetings with experts;
- Parallel Events: Exhibitions/UAC General Assembly and
- Specific Live Sessions.

VI. KEY THEMES

- Air Transport in Africa, Challenges and Passenger Rights ;
- SAATM, its implementation and the role of stakeholders;
- Regulation of electronic communications;
- Universal telecommunications services
- Inclusion and Financial Education ;
- Food sovereignty and the high cost of basic foodstuffs;
- Consumers and Climate Change;
- Citizenship and Citizen Control of Public Policies;
- Sustainability and financing of consumer associations.

VII. EXPECTED RESULTS

The main expected results are

- UAC members are equipped and their capacities strengthened with a view to contributing effectively to speeding up the implementation of the African Union Agreement on the Single Market for African Air Transport (SAATM) and promoting fair and equitable telecommunications regulation.
- The challenges and strategies for the effective implementation of SAATM and effective telecommunications regulation in Africa are identified and analysed.
- Collaboration between consumer organisations, governments, regional and international organisations and regulators in the civil aviation and telecommunications sectors is strengthened.
- The capacities of consumer organisation leaders are strengthened to enable them to influence policies that have an impact on consumers' quality of life.
- Governments, African sub-regional and regional integration organisations, development partners and the business community are made aware of the need to involve consumers in the formulation of integration and development policies.
- A roadmap of actions to be implemented at national and regional level is available.
- The governance and coordination bodies of the UAC have been renewed.

Join us to build an interconnected Africa !

For further information, kindly reach out to us:

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