

# Ms Poppy Khoza: Leading excellence and transformation in aviation



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## Q&A – Ms Poppy Khoza

Director of Civil Aviation (DCA)

**A woman who believes in leading by example and championing organisational values, such as service excellence, teamwork, integrity, collaboration and fostering good corporate governance, Poppy Khoza has achieved incredible success in the global aviation community.**

She is a leader who understands the importance of inspiring, motivating and empowering her teams, but also allowing them space to give their best as competent professionals while providing guidance and support.

Hailing from Sibongile, Dundee in the north of KwaZulu-Natal, Poppy was introduced to aviation while studying Travel and Tourism at the then Natal Technikon, which later became the Durban University of Technology. Her career humbly started at the South African Airways (SAA) as a customer service agent, where she patiently but persistently worked her way up. By the time she left SAA she was at management level.

She then joined the South African Civil Aviation Authority at senior management level, and again grew within the ranks ending up as the Director of Civil Aviation.

Though Poppy started off in civil aviation because of the possibility of travel, she soon learnt that civil aviation is, in fact, complex and extremely multi-faceted. The cross-border nature of aviation exposed her to many fields she had not known before. When approached by the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) Board of Directors and the Ministry of Transport to temporarily head the SACAA, though apprehensive, she stayed true to her nature and accepted the challenge. It was this move that accelerated her career to where she is today.

### **Flying High and Achieving Accolades**

At the helm of the Regulator, Poppy has achieved incredible achievements. As a regulatory authority the SACAA is charged with a responsibility to set standards and oversee the functioning of the aviation industry. Equally, the SACAA ensures that the country is compliant with international standards. South Africa's safety record has significantly improved and is now at 87,39% against a global average of 65% and the security record is currently at 81,3%, which far surpasses the

target set by ICAO for States to exceed 80% by 2023. It is worth noting that South Africa achieved this outcome in 2011 already.

During Poppy's tenure, the SACAA ensured that South Africa retained its United States – Federal Aviation Administration (US-FAA) Category 1 status, which is the highest a country can hold under the US-FAA International Aviation Safety Assessment (IASA). This pronouncement was received in July 2022, and confirmed that South Africa complies with the applicable ICAO standards for civil aviation safety oversight.

The SACAA was also subjected to the aviation security cargo systems scrutiny by both the United States Transport Security Administration (US-TSA) and the European Union Air Cargo or Mail Carrier operating from a Third Country Airport (EU ACC3) programme. Both the EU and TSA have granted South Africa a recognition status of SA cargo security systems.



**In addition to the above:**

- The Regulator has achieved nine clean audits in a period of 10 years and has for the past eight years achieved 100% in the organisation's Annual Performance Plans.
- The Regulator has become a transformed organisation with 51% of its labour force and 50% of the Executive team being female.
- The SACAA has implemented an Outreach Programme aimed at demystifying aviation, especially to previously disadvantaged communities.
- Implemented a bursary programme for students with big dreams but no financial capability and recently the SACAA celebrated a special graduation ceremony of the four young South African Cadet Pilot students who completed their training from the École Nationale de Aviation Civile (ENAC) Flight School, in Toulouse, France.
- Launched a learnership and trainee programme to support unemployed graduates with building their skills and empowering them with the well sought-after experience to enter the job market. The SACAA provides opportunities to at least 24 graduates per annum.
- In November 2022, the SACAA launched a series of client solutions to improve the customer experience of the industry. This included a new Contact Centre and an improved website with an e-Services portal - giving clients the ability to transact with the SACAA remotely and track applications in real-time.

- The SACAA also introduced card licences which replaced the booklet licences used by many countries to identify licence holders such as pilots, cabin crew and aircraft maintenance.
- The SACAA played a leading role in preparing the aviation industry for the outbreak of any communicable disease including Covid-19, Ebola, the Zika virus, etc. A Civil Aviation Pandemic Preparedness Plan was developed and approved as far back as 2007 and this prepared the industry by making sure that they develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOP).

**To allow the industry to cope during the hard lockdown period, the SACAA provided the following support and relief to the industry:**

- Validity of personnel licenses and certifications were extended, following a risk-based approach.
- The Regulator leveraged on technology to ensure business continuity by introducing virtual inspections and audits.
- Provided training to airlines at no cost to assist the industry with compliance to COVID-19 protocols.



- Relaxation of Covid-19 protocols such as filling the seats to full capacity in terms of passenger loading, and exemptions in relation to the curfew times.

**All the above enabled the airlines to continue to operate with less restrictions while ensuring the safety of passengers and crew.**

The SACAA is grateful for the support provided by the Department of Transport, who have paid a grant to ensure continuous safety and security oversight.



### Setting South Africa up on a World Stage

South Africa was given the distinguished honour of presiding over the 41st Assembly when Poppy was nominated to take up her position. Taking part in international regulatory discussions on aviation is meaningful for our country, as this keeps us at the forefront of aviation regulatory developments, with obvious advantages to aviation safety and security.

South Africa has also been part of global discussions on regulatory aspects through the years, and our most recent participation included the International Civil Aviation Organization’s 41st Assembly, when South Africa, with an unbroken membership in the 36-member Governing Council since 2003, was re-elected to serve in the Governing Council.

### Championing Transformation

In 2023 the SACAA hosted an event to celebrate the gains made by the industry to create a more transformed inclusive aviation landscape, shining the spotlight on transformation and the progress made in the aviation industry. Changes can be seen in the cockpit, boardrooms, workshop floors and other industry-related careers. Some are even moving into the aviation business arena, such as owning aviation training organisations. SACAA also emphasised the spirit of inclusivity and collaboration that has resulted in the slow but steady growth of the aviation transformation in the country. Aviation is not only about traditional professions such as piloting aircraft, so there was a need to ensure inclusivity in the fields of engineering, air traffic controlling, aviation medicine, aviation law and entrepreneurial aviation businesses.

Although much still needs to be done, the percentage of previously marginalised aviation personnel is steadily increasing.

At the end of September 2022, there were 32% African males and females in the combined category of licences pertaining to aircraft maintenance engineers, cabin crew and air traffic services.

**“Leaders must embrace diversity - for diverse workforces spark innovation, increase productivity, and better decisions are taken which can only enhance team performance.”**

– Ms Poppy Khoza, Director Of Civil Aviation (DCA)

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