



INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS' ASSOCIATIONS

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PRESS RELEASE

Spain has created serious concerns for air traffic safety within its airspace

IFATCA is a professional organization that promotes safety, efficiency and regularity in international aviation. To this end we are equally frustrated and fully understand the anger caused by the current disruptions to flights in Spain. We are especially aggrieved that the unplanned nature of these irregularities during a holiday period affected a large group of travelers and their families.

IFATCA understands that this crisis resulted when the imposed maximum number of working hours was surpassed, which meant controllers would effectively violate a Royal Decree imposed on them earlier this year. When this limit proved insufficient, as was previously predicted, AENA and the government simply changed it. Contrary to persistent reports in the press, air traffic controllers did NOT strike about pay, allowances or financial compensations.

To solve this entirely manufactured and avoidable problem, the Spanish Minister for Internal Affairs declared a “State of Alarm” – applicable only to air traffic controllers – on 4 December 2010. For the next 15 days, Spanish air traffic controllers are under military mobilization. By choosing conflict over any form of social dialogue, AENA and the Spanish government wish to divert attention from the main issue AENA faces: a series of disastrous financial decisions and the resulting deficit. Using controllers as scapegoats, they hope to salvage what is in essence a badly mismanaged state company.

By choosing to ‘resolve’ the conflict with a law last used 40 years ago under the Franco regime the Spanish government has created extremely serious concerns for the safety of air traffic and passengers travelling within the Spanish airspace. By forcing controllers to work under military supervision the government has cancelled all previous agreements derived through social dialogue. The Spanish authorities have not only disregarded all international conventions, including the Lisbon Treaty and basic human rights, they have also disregarded accepted safe standards and recommended practices.

Safe and reliable service cannot be guaranteed by military commands in any safety critical function. Given the duress under which our Spanish colleagues are forced to work, IFATCA declares that the safety of Spanish airspace and airports is severely compromised while this military rule is in force.

- 50 Years of Professional Involvement -
IFATCA has been representing air traffic controllers since 1961,
with more than 50.000 members in over 130 countries.

IFATCA fully supports our member association in these difficult times. We urge the Spanish government to reverse its decisions. This, and only this, will ensure that the Spanish airspace and airports can be safely controlled. We further request that the authorities immediately initiate open and unconditional discussions with controller representatives to guarantee stable and safe operations in the long term.

By resorting to totalitarian and dictatorial measures, Spain and its service provider can no longer be considered a worthy partner in international projects and we would submit it has effectively forfeited its Single European Sky (SES) certification. In addition, we submit that Spain has effectively reneged from international agreements and projects, up to and including commitments made to ICAO. IFATCA urges international organizations such as ICAO, the European Commission, EUROCONTROL, and CANSO to ensure that the situation in Spain doesn't escalate any further and that it realigns itself with international standards. Failure to do so could well trigger a wave of solidarity actions of controllers around Europe in support of their Spanish colleagues.

Only an open and constructive social dialogue, worthy of any democratic and civilized society, can resolve the current deadlock in Spanish service provision. The people of Spain and international air travellers deserve nothing less.

IFATCA is the worldwide organization representing more than fifty thousand air traffic controllers in 134 countries. Amongst its goals are the promotion of safety, efficiency and regularity in international air navigation and the protection and safeguarding of the interests of the air traffic control profession.

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