



CANSO STATEMENT ON FLIGHT DISRUPTION IN THE UK



Amsterdam, 30 August 2023 – CANSO (Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation) the global and regional voice of Air Traffic Management, has provided its views on the system failure that caused significant disruption in the United Kingdom earlier this week.

Simon Hocquard, Director General, CANSO said: “First and foremost, my thoughts are with those air passengers that have had their travel plans affected by this incident. Air Traffic Management organisations across the globe rely on a network of complex systems to safely maintain the separation of aircraft at all times. In the rare instances where a system fails, it can often be due to a seemingly small problem. Whenever a failure does occur the number one priority has to be, and is always safety.”

The disruption to UK air traffic this week was caused by a failure of NATS’ flight data processing system. In order for the global air traffic system to work, any commercial or civilian aircraft flying from one airport to another needs to file a flight plan. These flight plans contain a lot of information including the route the flight will take – this is essential as each flight invariably crosses different sections of airspace often under several jurisdictions. This important information allows sectors of airspace to ensure the safety of each aircraft entering and exiting it by maintaining separation from other flights and ensuring a smooth flow of traffic.

The processing of this essential data between sectors is done automatically, and there are millions of flight plans filed globally every month without disruption due to system failures. As an example, the UK has had a decade of flight plans filed with no technical issues. In the very rare instances where technology fails, Air Navigation Service Providers revert to the manual processing of flight data. This requires a lot of manpower and cannot be done as quickly as the technology processes it and so it is necessary to reduce the number of flights in and out of airspace sectors so that the information can be accurately processed manually in a timely manner. This slowing down of the number of flights is to ensure the safety of aircraft. Once the system is back up and running and fully tested, capacity can once again be restored.

Simon Hocquard added; “ANSPs around the globe are built on a century of safety and significant investment in their people, technology and processes. NATS is one of the leading ANSPs with a very high level of performance and reputation and the steps it took to fix the issue had safety at their very heart.”

NOTES FOR EDITORS

About CANSO

CANSO – the Civil Air Navigation Services Organisation – is the global voice of the air traffic management (ATM) industry and is shaping our future skies. Our members support over 90% of the world’s air traffic and include air navigation service providers, airspace users and operators, manufacturers and aviation industry suppliers. We raise the bar on global ATM performance by connecting the industry to share knowledge, expertise and innovation.

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