

General Aviation

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Chairman's message

IAOPA – the bigger picture

Fifty years ago this month the International Council of Aircraft Owner and Pilot Associations was formed in order to provide a voice for general aviation in ICAO, the International Civil Aviation Organisation. The latter came into being as a result of the signing in 1944 by 52 States of the Convention on International Civil Aviation (more generally known as the Chicago Convention) and ultimate ratification by all in 1947. It was recognised that international civil aviation could be a huge force for good by helping "...to create and preserve friendship and understanding among the nations and peoples of the world..." and by promoting "...cooperation between nations and peoples upon which the peace of the world depends..." The state governments that signed up to the Convention agreed "...on certain principles and arrangements in order that international civil aviation may be developed in a safe and orderly manner and that international air transport services may be established on the basis of equality of opportunity and operated soundly and efficiently..." These are extremely lofty ideals but this is where the history of IAOPA, and all the 69 individual affiliate country AOPAs, begins.

To facilitate international travel, it goes without saying that the various rules and procedures applying to air transport should, as far as possible, be the same in each country, even though there may be differences of language and legal system. ICAO developed standards and recommended practices (SARPS) to be adopted as far as possible in each of the signatory countries (many more now than the original 52). To take aircraft operations, for example, these cover fairly obvious topics such as flight preparation, in-flight procedures, aeroplane performance operating limitations, communication and navigation equipment, and aeroplane maintenance, to mention only a few. Thus, the rules and regulations from the CAA that we are familiar with in the UK are substantially compliant with the SARPS. An ICAO member state can either adopt a particular standard or file a difference, e.g. use of feet instead of metres. Having an input on standards is important; but note that Europe is now making it difficult for EU member states to file differences as standards have been converted into regulations.

A trawl through the ICAO website reveals little mention of general aviation, even though our particular chosen form of transport is readily used for international travel. In the early 1950s, it was becoming obvious to many pilots in AOPA US and others that the SARPS were heavily biased in favour of the world's airlines, to the extent that those regarding airspace, customs facilities, airports and rules of the air often neglected to register that general aviation even existed. By the late 1950s, AOPAs had formed in a small number of countries that had similar concerns, leading finally to the formation of IAOPA in February 1962 with the objective of gaining observer status at ICAO, which was granted in May 1964. The first IAOPA World Assembly was held in London in 1966, and it is a happy circumstance that the next Regional Meeting of IAOPA Europe will also be held in London in March this year. In 1967 in the UK, many GA aircraft owners and pilots were members of the British Light Aviation Centre Ltd, and it was the BLAC that was then approached and invited to join IAOPA and become a country affiliate AOPA.

So has IAOPA involvement in ICAO made a difference? You can bet it has! Replacing an annex not suited to GA activities, a new document, Annex 6, Part II Operation of Aircraft – International General Aviation – Aeroplanes was released in 1968, IAOPA playing a major part in its drafting. It has been revised since then but comparison with Part I – International Commercial Air Transport – Aeroplanes shows just how much regulation that would be unduly cumbersome and disproportionate to GA has been stripped out, and a degree of sensible flexibility introduced – a simple page count ratio of 4 to 1 highlights the achievement. GA input on other annexes followed. A more detailed account of the history of IAOPA and its beneficial impact is provided in its 50th Anniversary Issue of the IAOPA Bulletin that can be read on-line at www.iaopa.org.

It is easy to focus on the more immediate concerns that affect us personally as owners and pilots, such as Olympic airspace and aircraft operating costs in a restrictive financial climate, or the wider European issues arising from EASA, Part M, Flight Crew Licensing or airspace (Single European Sky and SESAR). But without IAOPA, we would not be AOPA UK, and the freedom of the skies we enjoy would not be so freely available as now. We cannot take this freedom for granted, though, which is why it is so important to support AOPA (or indeed any aviation association with similar objectives), and to remind any colleague non-subscribers of the fact!



George Done