

Media Release

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Gibb Takes To The Runway For Africa's Airport Infrastructure

Zimbabwe's Harare International Airport has made headlines recently with its imminent closure looming. It is reported that the airport runway, among the longest in Africa, has many large and dangerous potholes, making it extremely unsafe for use. Further, even though measures by the Civil Aviation Authority of Zimbabwe (CAAZ) have been undertaken since 2011 to seal and develop the runway; if sufficient airport rehabilitation is completed within three years, the transport focal point will face permanent closure.

Since 1994, the South African government has been instrumental in upgrading airport infrastructure. A reported R22 billion had been invested in South Africa for the upgrade of airports across the country. "We need to remember that the transport sector is a significant contributor of economic growth and social development. Aviation as a transportation method provides the economy with significant growth," advises Sumeshin Naidoo, Technical Executive at GIBB, South Africa's leading black-owned engineering firm. Poor records of safety and security, distance and limited connectivity, investment in education and training, lack of adequate resources and infrastructure and a lack of regulation are among the main challenges faced by the African aviation industry.

Naidoo comments, "The solid infrastructure and regular maintenance of airport runways and airfield systems should be of the highest importance for all African countries as a preventative measure to avoid a situation such as Harare's. With air travel and airlines increasing in nature and usage, it is imperative that the trust and safety of citizens is priority."

GIBB is home to specialist technical engineering experts who focus on building and sustaining infrastructure development in Africa. With over 50 years of engineering and infrastructure design and construction experience, GIBB has established a dedicated airports and aviation sector that was awarded a multitude of large scale projects on the African continent with each project showcasing innovation, design excellence and expertise.

Amongst the array of aviation projects undertaken by GIBB, is the specialisation in airport pavement management systems. Since 1998, GIBB has provided their expertise in pavement management systems to many South African airports. This has resulted in the efficient, safe and timely management and maintenance of airport runway infrastructure. The airports that have benefitted from GIBB's specialised consulting experience have successfully been able to plan and execute cost effective capital expenditure programmes with appropriate maintenance regimes. These have resulted in the longer lifespan of runway infrastructure without excessive degradation in the state of runway integrity.

GIBB has investigated and designed optimal runway friction system solutions for use on runway surfacing, with the goal of improving the state of airport runways in Southern Africa. GIBB ensures that local conditions, access to raw materials and construction methods suitable for the geographic region of the airport's location is factored into designs. "Expanding our footprint into neighbouring African countries is also a goal of GIBB's. By assisting and developing infrastructure using our specialised teams and understanding of the continent's unique challenges and development needs, GIBB is playing an active role in bridging the infrastructure gap on the rest of the African continent," states Naidoo.

Airport and runway maintenance could be more effective to avoid irreversible problems and Naidoo states, "It is important to have an unambiguous, generally accepted methodology for computing pavement damage. This will allow airport operators and constructors to adequately design pavements to accommodate new

aircrafts, and allow airlines to anticipate airport pavement weight restrictions in planning its operations. This will allow for appropriate aircraft choices which will not overstress existing runways or damage aircraft landing gear but rather, optimise airline operational performance.”

It has been proven that upfront investment and proper cost maintenance set up in the initiation of runway programmes, will reduce costs involved in fixing the problems later on. The deterioration of runways occur over time, with a five to ten year maintenance plan in place, GIBB provides thorough analysis and interpretation of data which effectively reduces costs whilst withstanding the quality and service of professionalism.

“To have effective commercial airports, African countries must adopt proper maintenance protocols and have solid infrastructure in place. Addressing these challenges could significantly impact future growth for the aviation industry. An investment in infrastructure development, safety, security and regulatory frameworks is of principle importance if African airports and African airlines are to become true global competitors,” concludes Naidoo.

Ends.



About GIBB:

GIBB is South Africa's leading black-owned engineering consulting firm, with an impressive track record of excellence spanning more than 55 years across various sectors. GIBB's headquarters are in Johannesburg with offices located across the continent.

GIBB is uniquely positioned to support the public and private sectors in delivering on the future infrastructural requirements of South Africa. The firm's proven expertise and strong team of locally grown talent allows GIBB to confidently and consistently deliver excellence. GIBB has a growing presence in Africa, and understands local requirements by working with indigenous teams and locally based knowledge.

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