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Media Statement: South Africa Marks International Day of the Air Traffic Controller

The Minister of Transport, Ms. Barbara Creecy today shared a message of gratitude to South African Air Traffic controllers. The Minister says the Air Traffic Controllers' ability to manage the skies with precision and calm, even under challenging conditions, is a testament to their unwavering commitment to safety. "Our controllers exemplify resilience, ensuring our skies remain safe despite challenges. Their role is crucial in maintaining the integrity and efficiency of our airspace, and we are immensely proud of their contributions."

"A positive attitude is a cornerstone of excellence in air traffic control. Our controllers' ability to maintain high standards and ensure smooth operations, even when things do not go as planned, is remarkable. Their optimism and resilience are key to their high performance. As we celebrate their contributions today, we acknowledge the importance of their positive outlook in navigating the complexities of air traffic management. Their dedication to maintaining high standards keeps our skies safe and our operations seamless," says ATNS Board Chairman, Mr. Zola Majavu CD (SA).

ATNS CEO, Ms. Nozipho Mdawe says teamwork is at the heart of air traffic control, ensuring that every flight is managed safely and efficiently. "Our controllers collaborate closely with various sectors to guarantee safe landings and take-offs. This effective teamwork is essential, as it involves many people and sectors working together. On this special day, we recognize the critical role of teamwork in air traffic control and celebrate the collaborative spirit that drives our controllers to excel. Their ability to work together seamlessly makes our air traffic management system one of the best in the world."

Technology has significantly transformed air traffic control, introducing advancements like AI and remote towers. These innovations have led to increased productivity, as controllers now have reduced monitoring demands, allowing them to focus on critical tasks. Safety has also improved, with technology enhancing the quality of air traffic management. Advanced tools enable better monitoring and planning, allowing controllers to predict and respond to changes proactively.

Moreover, the air traffic service environment now emphasises the well-being of controllers, incorporating wellness programmes to support their skills and overall health. This holistic approach ensures that controllers can deliver the best possible service. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted air traffic services, causing losses and challenges in maintaining skills due to reduced flight activity. "ATNS had to innovate and focus on staff wellness during this difficult time. The pandemic highlighted the resilience of our controllers and the importance of workforce productivity and well-being," adds Ms Mdawe.

Education is crucial in our society, especially in air traffic management. Discussing degree qualifications in this field is essential for enhancing the quality of air traffic services. Higher education can attract more interest and effort, leading to better-trained controllers who understand the complexities of their environment. This focus on education will improve the industry and the country's air traffic services.

In conclusion, Ms Mdawe says South African air traffic controllers are highly regarded globally, with many being recruited internationally. She says Job satisfaction goes beyond remuneration as it includes a supportive environment that promotes holistic wellness. "Encouraging experienced expats to return would benefit the industry by bringing back their expertise and allowing them to enjoy the comforts of home while continuing their passion for air traffic control. Their return would significantly enhance the quality of service in South Africa".

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