

REDUCTION OF BRITISH AIRWAYS SLOTS ON THE LAGOS-LONDON ROUTE

The flight slot granted to the British Airways will be reduced from 7 (Seven) to 3 (Three) per week effective from 8th November 2011 on the Lagos-London route. According to a winter schedule issued by the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), British Airways will operate flights in and out of Lagos on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Although the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN) cited operational reasons for the restriction, the rumored cause of this is the alleged refusal by the British Airport Authorities to grant slots to Arik Air at the London Heathrow Airport.

It is instructive to note that there is in existence, a Bilateral Air Service Agreement (BASA) between the United Kingdom and Nigeria signed since 1958 which creates reciprocal rights to the contracting parties. Under the BASA, each country has 21 frequencies to use each other's airspace unhindered. Currently, British Government utilizes its 21 frequencies fully, British Airways has 7(Seven) slots on the Lagos-London route, 7(Seven) slots on the Abuja-London route and the remaining 7(Seven) is being utilized by Virgin Atlantic for its Lagos-London route. However, when it was time for Arik Air to utilize its slot on the Abuja-London route, they were informed by the British Authorities that slots are only available if they are rented. Consequently, the Airline was forced to rent from the British Midland International (BMI), a private Company, in total disregard of the BASA.

The reduction of the flight slot for British Airways could have a multiplier good or bad effect. In the eyes of foreign investors and aviation stakeholders, Nigeria could be seen as not conforming to International Conventions and Treaties, which will in turn affect the economy negatively. On a positive note, the reduction in British Airways slots will provide an opportunity for both Government to re negotiate the terms and conditions of the Bilateral Air Service Agreement (BASA).

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