



PROVIDING BETTER CARE

The history of the Air Crash Victims Families Federation International organisation

WRITTEN BY



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IN THE YEAR 2000, Hans Ephraimson, President of the Victims Association of the United States attended an ECAC (European Civil Aviation Conference) Workshop in Tallinn, Estonia. A new page in Family Assistance was turned at this event when ICAO decided to support the publication of Circular 285, a guidance document on assistance to air accident victims and their families, following Resolution A32-7 of the ICAO Assembly.

In 2011, the NTSB hosted the first International Conference of Air Accident Victims and their Families in Washington, when Ms. Deborah Hersman was the NTSB Chair. At this event I witnessed for myself the advances in family assistance that had taken place during the time since the tragedy in Madrid (Spain) on August 20th, 2008, when an MD82 aircraft of the now defunct airline Spanair crashed during take-off at Adolfo Suarez Madrid-Barajas airport. There were 154 deceased and 18 survivors from this accident. The response to the tragedy was chaotic and consequently, the suffering was increased for the 172 families who lost our relatives on this very sad day.

At this time we received the support of the Governments of the United States and Spain and the NTSB and ICAO to update Circular 285, which had been in existence for 10 years (2001-2011). Until then, this was the only guidance on the provision of assistance to air accident victims and their families at international level.

During the Conference, it was decided that Circular 285 would become "ICAO Policy on assistance to air accident victims and their families" under the responsibility of the General Secretary. In addition, it was decided to introduce a Recommendation to Annex 9, Rec 8.46, which led to the

inclusion of Family Assistance in the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP).

Task Force 285, established under the aegis of ICAO, was formed by representatives of 37 States, the NTSB, International organizations such as IFALPA, IFATCA, etc. and the Air Crash Victims Family Group (ACVFG) with Hans Ephraimson and myself. Mr. Victor M. Aguado who was the Representative of Spain in ICAO, was the President of the Task Force. In a short time, there was consensus on the wording of Document 9998 which describes ICAO Policy on Assistance to Air Accident Victims and their Families.

I had the privilege of representing the air accident victims at the ICAO Council which was held on March 1st, 2013, this was the first time that accident victims and their families were represented in this forum. Finally, ICAO Doc. 9998 was adopted unanimously by the 36 states represented in the Council, and the document was then ratified by the 38th ICAO General Assembly which was held in September - October 2013. Ms. Hersman, the NTSB Chair, and Ms. Pastor, Spanish Minister of Transport attended, in addition to Hans Ephraimson as Chief of ACVFG, and myself as the Deputy Chief.

The achievements listed in this article happened within recent international civil aviation history and it is a reflection on the air accident victims struggle to improve the assistance provided to people who are touched by the tragedy of an aircraft accident in any part of the world. Because, in the end, all air disasters have similar stages of hurt and grief and our goal is to make the pain of losing loved ones more bearable through sharing knowledge and experiences.



Hans Ephraimson (front row, second left), ICAO leaders, global transportation officials and victims' family advocates following the introduction of ICAO's "Policy on Assistance to Aircraft Victims and Their Families"

Aircraft accident victims associations are like bubbles, they are established when an accident happens and they disappear when investigations, both judicial and social, are completed and there are compensations. The hardest part is surviving as a non-profit association, working generously for the common good, no matter what country an accident has occurred in or what the nationalities of the victims were.

Therefore, the Federation will continue to exist whether we can be together under the same umbrella, in accordance with the saying: whether you walk alone then you finish fast, whether you walk together you go farther. Also with the help of the governments of our countries, through a loyal collaboration before the occurrence of air accidents and not later, when the tragedy has already occurred and the pain nests in the hearts of the victims who have suffered.

The death of Hans in October 2013 at 93 years of age was a serious setback for the members of the ACVFG. In his farewell, after the historic picture above, he made me promise that we would finish what we started together in 2010 and that I would never stop working for the goals we shared and that is what I have been doing since he left.

Therefore, in July 2015 we founded in Madrid the Air Crash Victims' Families Federation International - ACVFFI - with the participation of these Associations; Spanish AVJK5022, HIOP-AF447 of Germany and ACAA ED202 from Pakistan. The Federation is registered in the Register of Associations of the Spanish Ministry of the Interior. I had the honor of being elected as Chairperson, a position that has been renewed annually from then until today.

In February 2016, for the first time in its history, the ICAO Council recognized an International Federation of Air Accident Victims as an international organization to be invited to its events. So continuity in that organization is guaranteed, as long as ACVFFI continues to operate as it has been doing so far, placing itself at the level of International Organizations such as IATA, IFALPA, IFATCA, CANSO, etc. with a voice on the international scene which provides the vision of the people who suffer the consequences of an aircraft accident.

At the 39th ICAO General Assembly held in September 2016, we presented 3 Working Papers related to the investigation and prevention of air accidents and assistance to victims so that recommendation 8.46 of Annex

9 becomes a Standard and finally, the creation in ICAO of a Database of safety recommendations addressed, or not, to the said organization.

Much progress has been made but we must keep working hard from ACVFFI for the benefit of society in general and of aircraft users in particular. Putting at the service of the common good the experiences suffered by the people who make it up, sharing knowledge, working and also the pain. In addition to promoting in our countries of origin all possible improvements in favor of aviation safety, research, and prevention of air accidents, passenger rights, assistance to victims, recognition of the best practices with respect to insurers regarding the victims, etc. Ultimately, following the path that began in 2000 and has continued until today.

Making ACVFFI known in all international forums will allow other Victims Associations or people committed to the project to register as members, in addition to contributing in solidarity to achieve the objectives we defend.

On the ACVFFI website - www.aircrashvictims.com - you can find the information and how to join. ◊