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THE SACAA STRONGLY REJECTS CLAIMS IT SEEKS TO SILENCE WHISTLEBLOWERS

Ikhaya Lokundiza, Centurion - The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) rejects the selective reporting and misleading portrayal of the organisation in articles published by *The Citizen* on 24 August 2026 titled '*Air crash: Whistle-blower fired*' and 25 August 2026 titled '*Civil aviation whistleblower firing sparks calls for independent probe*' relating to a former employee of the Authority.

The articles create the impression that the SACAA dismissed the former employee for raising safety concerns relating the ZS-CAR accident. The article further claims that the SACAA dismissed the employee for filing a whistleblowing report on the organisation's *Whistleblowing* Hotline and claims that the organisation is now pursuing legal action to prevent the former employee from exposing 'wrongdoing'. This reporting and narrative are both false and deliberately malicious. As a principle, the SACAA does not engage the media on employer and employee related matters. Respecting the interest the media had in this matter and in the spirit of transparency, the SACAA responded to the Citizen's queries. The SACAA's responses, however, were regrettably ignored in the published articles to push a sensationalist angle. Here are the facts:

- The employee was suspended on 26 March 2026 at 10:00 on account of gross misconduct, pending an investigation. After the suspension had been communicated, he brought to the attention of management that he had filed a complaint through the company's whistleblowing hotline. Management at this time had no knowledge or evidence of the whistleblowing report and upon investigation discovered that the report was filed by the whistleblower at 11:09 - post the suspension. By the time the suspension was communicated to the employee, the decision had already been made to suspend him hence the meeting of 26 March 2026 at 10:00. It must be noted that the hotline is independently managed by a contracted service provider and the

SACAA does not have sight of the reports until they are communicated to the organisation through the appropriate channels.

- In line with the SACAA policies on whistleblowing, the report was sent to the Board for their attention and action.
- Moreover, the organisation also became aware that the employee had reached out to the Department of Transport who referred his complaint to the Board for further investigation. When the Board engaged the employee on his complaints, the employee wilfully and without coercion withdrew the whistleblowing claims on 25 May 2026. The SACAA confirms that there is therefore no pending whistleblowing report from this employee.

In our understanding a whistleblowing disclosure must be used to report unlawful and irregular conduct and should not be used for personal interests. To this end, the SACAA has established mechanisms to encourage employees and the industry including the general public to use the whistleblowing platform to report illegal, unethical, corrupt and unsafe activities and inculcate a culture of accountability and integrity.

Therefore, media reports suggesting that the SACAA is targeting a whistleblower are false, frivolous and misleading. The employee was taken through a disciplinary process for various charges unrelated to the whistleblowing claims and was subsequently dismissed for gross misconduct. The SACAA will not disclose the nature of the misconduct respecting all his rights as enshrined in the labour laws of the country.

- On the ZS-CAR accident manuscript, which was written by the former employee, the matter is before the courts and the SACAA will not comment on it because it is *sub judicae*. The SACAA had approached the courts to hear this matter on an urgent basis and the judge ruled that the matter was not urgent and therefore the substantive issues are yet to be dealt with by the court on a future date.

ENDS

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