

# DRONE:

## A TECHNOLOGY THAT HAS COME TO STAY

By Aminat Bakare



Delegates present at the 4th Drone technology conference

**D**rones, also known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) or Remote Piloted Aircraft System (RPAS) are machines that can fly without being piloted by humans and crews or passengers. Drones are used for various purposes including distribution of drugs, blood, emergency rescue kits, spraying of farm pesticides, and logistics etc. The future of drone industry in the Nigerian aviation industry looks promising as the sector is gradually becoming a niche of its own.

"Undoubtedly, a new sector has emerged of the aviation industry, offering unique opportunities that were once a dream, this new sector is opening multidimensional opportunities, crisscrossing aviation and non-aviation sectors, offering jobs and enterprise opportunities to many." Says the Convener Mr. Fortune Idu at the 4th Drone Technology Conference which took place in Lagos, Nigeria May 2024.

The 3-day event which focused on promoting a national dialogue on drone technology in Nigeria was witnessed by Nigeria's Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Mr. Festus Keyamo who was represented by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Dr. Emmanuel Meribole, and other prominent aviation stakeholders.

African nations are actively participating in the global race for leadership in the RPAS technology and this includes Nigeria despite the regulations of the Federal Government. Today,

the use of drone in Nigeria has become a popular trend whether it is for private or commercial use.

### Call For Collaboration

There is a need for collaboration between drone operators, national security and aviation regulators in order to promote the safe application of the technology. According to the Minister drone has "huge potential in the various sectors of the economy and Nigeria will not be left out in its full utilization," hence, the need to balance the benefits and the risks in the country.

The Honourable Minister also noted that "collaboration between government, industry, and research institutions is essential for maximizing the benefits of RPAS technology." He further stated that "the Ministry is open to more interactions with the public and welcomes suggestions to help advance the usefulness of this technology. We call on our research centres to develop solutions for applications and production capabilities to make Nigeria a leading player in this industry and not a dumping ground". The Federal Government has demonstrated its commitment to the "responsible use of the RPAS with the creation of a dedicated RPAS unit within NCAA and the integration of RPAS operations into national civil aviation policy."

### Regulating Drones

To avoid misuse and to curb so many risks which include

terrorism, criminality, and collision with aircraft in the airspace, amongst others, there is need for the efficient and proper regulation of the use of unmanned vehicles. In view of this, the Honourable Minister said: "While the Ministry desires the advancement associated with the use of drones, focus must at all times remain on protecting civil aviation and countering their exploitation by non-State armed groups and terrorists".

Efforts to regulate drone operations in Nigeria led to the release of "Part 21 of the Nigeria Civil Aviation Regulations being the regulatory framework, sets out requirements for certification, registration, operations, and surveillance of drones or Remotely Piloted Aircraft System, RPAS." The Nigerian CAA was called upon to ensure that all RPAS are duly registered and its pilots are competent to make the airspace safe for everyone. NCAA said that "so far, twenty-three (23) ROCs have been issued to operators with several other applicants in the pool."

### The Need For Training

To build capacity and competency in the drone sector, training of operators must be enhanced. The Director of Aerodrome and Aerospace Standards (DAAS) of the NCAA, Engr. Godwin Balang said that "a Competency Based Training for UAS operators is pivotal, so as to reduce potential risk to lives and property." He further explained



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that it is now mandatory to obtain a Remote Pilot License to operate a drone in Nigeria.

The call by the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology (NCAT) on the Federal Government and the Ministry of Aviation and Aerospace to "grant the approval for the commencement of Drone training program in the College" is timely.

Drones have come to stay as an integral part of world economies and Nigeria cannot be seen to lag behind. While pursuing fully the adoption of this nascent technology, safety and security must also be given their pride of place. All over the world, there is a move to integrate drones into the aviation sector in a responsible way without limiting its capacity to drive change and improve lives. ▣

# Fleet Expansion

## Qatar Executive Welcomes First Gulfstream G700 Aircraft To Doha

**Q**atar Executive (QE), the corporate jet subsidiary of Qatar Airways Group, has "welcomed the delivery of two new Gulfstream G700 aircraft to the fleet, becoming the worldwide exclusive commercial operator of the aircraft," becoming the first carrier to "offer the Gulfstream G700 to charter customers, continuing to provide an ultra-modern fleet with the ultimate in aircraft capabilities, luxury and performance."

Qatar Airways Group Chief Executive Officer, Engr. Badr Mohammed Al-Meer, said the Gulfstream G700 aircraft joins Qatar Executive's "existing fleet of 15 Gulfstream G650ER aircraft to include the pinnacle of business aviation excellence and look forward to seeing our guests on board soon to experience this technologically advanced aircraft."



QE is the first carrier to offer the Gulfstream G700 to charter customers

President of Gulfstream, Mr. Mark Burns, said: "Qatar Executive has been a valued Gulfstream customer for nearly 10 years. We are honoured to have them as our international partner for the launch and first deliveries of the all-new G700. We look forward to growing their fleet in the months ahead."

Qatar Executive expects an additional eight G700 to be delivered in the near future, with two aircraft already received and two more set to arrive within weeks. The new G700 fleet will enter full commercial service in June, and QE is already taking advance expressions of interest from clients to charter the new aircraft. ▣