

Strike by workers at St Lucia's main airport causes major delays

Trade group calls for more ground service support



After workers strike, IATA calls for more ground service providers at St Lucia's international airport. PHOTO BY BRENT PINHEIRO

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One day after striking airport workers caused major delays and cancellations at St Lucia's Hewanorra International Airport (UVF), its main international airport, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) is calling on

stakeholders to implement long-term structural changes to improve the island's aviation sector.

According to reports, approximately 80 per cent of the staff at the airport's only ground handling provider called in sick, disrupting operations at the airport.

Saint Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority (SLASPA), the organisation with responsibility for managing UVF, confirmed the disruptions in a late evening release.

It said, "The Hewanorra International Airport experienced flight disruptions as a result of what appeared to be industrial action by staff of the Ground Handling Service Provider at the airport. Through a collaborative effort by the airlines, senior management personnel of the Ground Handler, airport Stakeholders and SLASPA, most flight operations were facilitated. However, some delays were experienced and there were three flight cancellations as a result."

The Saint Lucia Air and Sea Ports Authority also apologised to all passengers inconvenienced as a result of the industrial action.

But in a media release, IATA, which represents over 300 airlines around the world, said the workers' action has "damaged confidence in Saint Lucia's sole aviation gateway."

Peter Cerdá, IATA's regional vice president for the Americas, said, "We are also seeking direct engagement with the Ministers of Transport and Tourism to ensure a swift resolution to this labour dispute and to discuss long-term reforms to prevent such vulnerabilities in the future."

The trade association is also calling for more ground-handling service providers to be made available at UVF.

Passengers affected by Saturday's cancellations were expected to be re-accommodated on flights departing yesterday.

Several major carriers offer scheduled flights into Hewanorra International Airport including JetBlue, American Airlines, West-Jet, Delta, and British Airways.