

Flying Labs: Equal Opportunity Drone Regulations Charter

We are the Flying Labs Network. We represent the interests, experience and priorities of local drone experts, entrepreneurs, business professionals and engineers in 20+ countries worldwide:

Bénin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Fiji, India, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, La Réunion, Morocco, Nepal, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Sénégal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

We kindly request that national aviation authorities and international regulators take into account the interests and experience of *local* drone experts, entrepreneurs, business professionals and engineers. We kindly request equal access to opportunities including the ability to acquire drone pilot licenses, flight permissions, drone insurance and contracted work. We welcome competition from foreign drone experts and companies as long as this competition is based on fair play: a level playing field that grants equal opportunity to local experts.

Based on our experience to date, we believe that foreign drone experts and international drone companies have an unfair advantage. They repeatedly get the vast majority of contracts for drone projects from clients. These clients may ignore the fact that we exist and have the expertise, technologies and capacity to carry out these same drone projects. What's more, we can offer our services at more competitive prices because we have lower overheads (no need for international flights and import/export taxes, for example). Furthermore, we know our own countries better, know the local language(s) and the terrain and weather. What's more, we are already connected to our own national aviation authorities and other government partners. This means that we can often complete drone projects more quickly. In addition, we create locally owned drone businesses and in the process create meaningful local jobs and career opportunities for local professionals. In sum, we directly contribute to the development and progress of our own countries.

Most of the countries we are from, and work in, have now implemented drone regulations. But many of these countries don't have certification programs in place or a streamlined flight permissions process that takes into account our interests, expertise and local comparative advantage. It is particularly difficult and expensive for us to acquire foreign drone pilot licenses, e.g., from the UK or France. As such, we kindly request the opportunity to work with our own aviation authorities to find appropriate solutions and streamlined processes that enable us to compete on a level playing field. Without drone pilot licenses and a flight permissions process that takes local professionals into account, we cannot seek contracted work from international clients. We also kindly request access to insurance solutions from our own countries.

India's approach to drone regulations is perhaps worth partly replicating in other countries. Indian authorities do not allow foreign drone pilots or companies to operate in India. Instead, these pilots or companies are required to work directly through an existing Indian drone operator or company. This ensures that local drone pilots and companies have direct access to new opportunities while also building their own expertise and track-record. We recognize that this may be perceived as unfair by international operators but the fact is that the status quo is highly unfair to begin with. At the heart of the matter is the digital divide. To be sure, American, European and Australian clients are not hiring Jamaican, Moroccan or Fijian drone operators.

We thus kindly request that national aviation authorities adopt a similar approach to India's regulations but for a limited time (say 5 years) in order to help build our own local and national drone industry. Alternatively, or in addition, foreign companies should be required to pay higher fees for flight permissions in order to help protect and nurture local drone businesses.

Lastly, we kindly request that international organizations working on humanitarian, development, health, agriculture and environmental projects not overlook the local expertise and capacity that *already* exists. We are already in country, already have most if not all the required skills, already have relevant technologies and partnerships, and already have the local knowledge to respond quickly and effectively. We thus kindly request that we not be excluded from participating in these important projects in our own countries. Hire smart, hire local.

Signatories

60+ local experts, entrepreneurs and engineers from Bénin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Fiji, India, Jamaica, Japan, Kenya, La Réunion, Morocco, Nepal, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Sénégal, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.