MORE PROFESSIONALS DEDICATED TO SERVING AVIATION INDUSTRY - INTERVIEW WITH WISSAM MEHYOU

News / Maintenance / Trainings, Personalities

Sometimes, after following industry leaders for a while, we wait for aviation events to get the possibility to meet them in person. For me, this was the situation when it was revealed that Mr. Wissam Mehyou, CEO of Intercontinental Aviation Enterprise, would be attending CARIBAVIA 2025. Regretfully, Mr. Mehyou was unable to attend the conference. Therefore, I had to do the interview using contemporary technologies. I want to express my gratitude to Mr. Wissam Mehyou for our excellent conversation. Of course, I still have more questions for him. I am pleased to share with you the main points of our discussion.?

T.O.: Wissam, how did you end up in aviation and why?

W.M.: I honestly believe that aviation found me. I have a very close friend, his name is Husam Raidan he is on the Board of Air Arabia. I often tell him, “Husam, I don’t think we went looking for aviation. I think aviation came looking for us.” If you look at people who’ve been successful in this industry, many who tried to transition from unrelated fields, like real estate development, manufacturing, even education, have not lasted. There’s hardly an example of someone coming

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from outside aviation and truly thriving long-term.

Since childhood, I dreamed of becoming a pilot. It wasn't a decision I made at a specific point in my life; it's always been there. I've had this passion for as long as I can remember. So, when I finished high school, I went straight into pilot training. And here we are today. To answer your question: when and why? I honestly don't know. It wasn't a conscious choice. It just feels like this path was already written for me.

T.O.: Do you think having a roadmap is an absolute must for the aviation community? Should we be working with a real-time roadmap?

W.M.: Let me answer this from a different angle. I'm an Arab from the Middle East. I come from a heritage where our ancestors lived in tents in the desert, rode camels, and drank camel milk to survive the harsh climate. Fast forward to today, people from all over the world want to come live in our middle eastern countries. Why? Because of one thing: vision.

In just 50 years, our leaders, our rulers, built something remarkable. The UAE, for example, is only 54 years old. That's the power of vision. Everything in life, not just aviation, needs to be built on a solid vision. That's the lesson we need to carry forward.

When leaders who we look up to as mentors say, "Here's where we want to be by 2035," or "Here's the 2040 target," it's not just talk. That's the mentality we must adopt. Unfortunately, about 65% of aviation organizations globally still don't have that. They lack real vision.

We could name the few that do. At Intercontinental Aviation Enterprise, the holding company for our aviation businesses, we've built a strong and actionable vision. It's our roadmap. It's our Bible. For example, we've published IAEVision2030 specifically for training. We know exactly where we want to be in 2026, how many bases we'll operate, how many flying hours, how many aircraft we'll add to the fleet. The plan continues through 2027, 2028, and all the way to 2030.

And to surprise you, we've already extended our vision to 2035. But we're not announcing that part yet. First, we want to execute the next two to three years, 2026 through 2028, successfully. At the end of the day, you can't get in a car and expect to arrive if you don't know where you're going. You need a roadmap. You need to know the destination and every step along the journey.

T.O.: What do you believe is crucially missing in aviation education today?

W.M.: It's simple. More visionary leaders and more professionals.

T.O.: Do you think the lack of universal aviation rules and regulations is an obstacle for companies like yours to achieve faster development?

W.M.: Actually, for us it's the opposite. It's easier. Because we've learned to build something that works outside the conventional framework. It's part of our vision. When we enter new markets, we don't just expand for the sake of it. We do it because we've gained the operational knowledge, the local insight, and the capacity to make it work. Every time we open a new base, it's because the previous one reached full capacity, and we've saturated the space and can't take more students. That demand pushes us to open new regions.

For example, part of our 2026 vision includes opening our 5th flying base in Portugal. Why Portugal? Because we've seen rising demand from Western Europe and North Africa, and we no longer have the capacity to accommodate those students in Greece and Cyprus. We opened Greece because Cyprus was full. Now Greece is close to reaching capacity, and Lebanon is

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performing well. The UAE serves the Indian subcontinent and the Middle East, which is already a huge market, and even that’s not enough anymore.

That’s why, in Q1 of 2027, we’re also planning to launch a flying base in Saudi Arabia. These expansions are all driven by data, demand, and strategic planning, not just opportunity.

Now, the challenge comes when other organizations enter these markets without structure. There are no universal aviation standards, and that creates instability. Some companies come in, drop prices just to recruit students, and disrupt the market. They can’t compete, so they shut down, and we’re left cleaning up the mess. Pardon the expression, but that’s the reality. We’ve seen it over and over. Three times in Lebanon, several times in Cyprus and Greece.

When we enter a market, we bring quality, consistency, and structure. Our pricing remains stable across all bases. We don’t devalue the model to compete. We lead with quality. Another key to our approach is integrating the university academic model into aviation training. That’s how we’re building our ground school infrastructure. We’ve already begun forming strategic partnerships with universities to create a standardized education pipeline across multiple countries.

The first milestone was signing with Al-Faisal University in Saudi Arabia. The second partnership will be announced next month in Iraq, followed in Lebanon, the UAE, and Cyprus. These partnerships will help us standardize aviation education globally.

We’ve developed our own admission test and entry exam, followed by a two-to-three-month “Fundamentals of Aviation” course. This is our primary filter. If a student can pass this course, they’re ready for the next step.

And here’s the real goal: I don’t want students flying across countries just to start training. I want them to access high-quality ground school in their home countries. Through these university partnerships, we’re building 32 ground school bases globally by 2030.

The model is simple: the student completes the initial course at the partner university, earns a diploma from the university and a certificate from us, and then proceeds to flight training at one of our bases. After finishing flight training, the student also has the option to return home, complete one more academic year, and graduate with an Aviation Management Diploma from the university.

This way, students gain both the professional pilot lifestyle and the academic foundation. It’s an end-to-end model that merges pilot training with university life.

Our first test case is already a success. Iraq will be next, followed by Lebanon and the UAE. By the end of the year, this model will be fully validated. Once that happens, our team will roll it out to new regions, including India, Pakistan, Turkey, and several African and European countries.

And if one of those regions performs strongly, we may even consider opening a flight base there. That’s how we’re building the pipeline. That’s how we’re delivering on our vision. And yes, it’s already validated.

T.O.: When you talk about building pipelines, this is exactly what’s needed to ensure the future of the aviation workforce. I had hoped to interview you during CARIBAVIA 2025, but unfortunately, you couldn't make it to the event. So, let me ask you now, do you have any plans for the Caribbean region? The region needs aviation with a clear vision and structure.

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W.M.: Yes, I do. I plan to establish both a local AOC and a local training organization in the Caribbean before 2030.

But here's the challenge: the Caribbean lacks leadership. What's missing is someone who stands up and says, "Here's what we need to do, steps 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, for the next five years." If someone takes that initiative seriously, I'm ready to do the same. The difficulty I've faced so far is finding serious, committed partners,mainly governments. That's been a major hurdle. Still, I remain optimistic and confident about the potential.

The biggest issue in the Caribbean today is regulatory fragmentation. Each island operates under different rules. One country uses EASA, another follows ICAO, and another uses FAA regulations. This lack of alignment is a major obstacle to growth and cooperation. There's enormous potential in the Caribbean, but a lot of foundational work needs to be done at the regulatory and organizational levels. Without a unified aviation framework across the region, meaningful development will remain a struggle.

T.O.: Thank you very much! I'm sure I'll have many more questions for you in the future. I truly believe that people who get the chance to see you at aviation events and hear your vision will be impacted. Even that alone can shift mindsets, especially among those already in the industry who have the potential to do better. Your insights could help reshape attitudes and inspire progress within aviation.

W.M.: You're always welcome anytime. And thank you for your time. I really hope so. The aviation industry is like a massive pie; there's more than enough for everyone to get their fair share. I genuinely want to see all aviation organizations succeed and thrive. We need more professionals dedicated to serving this beautiful industry.

If we don't unite, we'll just end up wasting energy competing over nothing. This industry cannot function on rivalries and conflict. It only works one way: through development, collaboration, and partnerships. We must work together to build a stronger, more sustainable aviation future.

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