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Swiss WorldCargo carries out five flights on behalf of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Eighteen months after the advent of the crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect different countries worldwide. Within this context, Swiss WorldCargo has continued to find new and innovative ways to help combat the crisis.

Swiss WorldCargo has always been committed to the safe, reliable transportation of goods and materials worldwide. Historically, we have focused on high-value goods demanding additional levels of security and flexibility, such as pharmaceuticals. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted our focus a bit. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Swiss WorldCargo has imported thousands of tons of medical supplies and materials, including gowns, masks and caps. Likewise, beginning in December 2020, we have transported COVID-19 vaccines throughout the world, helping to ensure that these medicines are available for different countries and their citizens.

This past summer, we were able to support the fight against the pandemic on a local level. Between May and August 2021, we carried out five flights on behalf of the Swiss Confederation's humanitarian aid (HA) arm of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), supporting five different countries in the process.

Flight 1: Delhi

Our mission began with a first flight to Delhi in early May. Given the quite difficult situation in India at the time, the SDC/HA and Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) offered to help by sending much-needed medical supplies. On 6 May, Swiss WorldCargo transported 600 oxygen concentrators & 50 respirators onboard an Airbus A330-300 to Delhi. The effort received broad appreciation and support, with recognition from diverse political and health figures in both Switzerland and India. The successful flight operations paved the way for four further flights.



Flights 2 and 3: Jakarta and Colombo

In July, Swiss WorldCargo carried out two flights, to Jakarta, Indonesia, and Colombo, Sri Lanka. Both flights were operated as cargo-only flights carrying out medical supplies. The flight to Colombo was operated by an Airbus A330-300 aircraft from our sister airline, Edelweiss. The flight to Jakarta was carried out by an Swiss Boeing 777-300ER, and carried over 16 tons of cargo onboard, including more than 600 oxygen concentrators.

Both flights were instrumental in helping support the local fight against hard-hit areas in Indonesia and Sri Lanka. Jakarta, in particular, was notable as it is not part of the regular SWISS or Swiss WorldCargo regularly served schedule, and was therefore operated as a “first-time” destination.



Flights 4 and 5: Bangkok and Ho Chi Minh City/Saigon

A fourth flight took place in the beginning of August. Swiss WorldCargo operated a cargo-only Boeing 777-300ER aircraft to Bangkok, Thailand. Onboard, we carried 26 tons of respirators and antigen tests, as well as other medical materials. Finally, towards the end of August, we carried out a fifth flight to Ho Chi Minh City/Saigon, Vietnam. This flight was also operated by an Edelweiss Airbus A330-300 aircraft. We again carried medical goods and equipment, this time with over 13 tons onboard.

View from SDC/HA

Markus Hischier, Head of SDC/HA Logistics, explained that SWISS and SDC/HA have built up a strong partnership over the course of several decades. They work together as part of the SWISS RESCUE CHAIN, a private-public partnership of different organizations responsible for the transportation of humanitarian goods to other countries in order to combat crises, such as earthquakes. This under the motto: Saving lives and alleviating suffering.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Markus worked closely with several counterparts at SWISS. He pointed out that this collaboration often involved planning and coordination within a very short timeframe. Additionally, different challenges occurred behind-the-scenes in preparation. This ranged from the procurement of materials to coordinating with airline counterparts to securing traffic rights for new destinations. Likewise, his team liaised with local authorities and the FDFA network (Swiss embassies) and international politicians in order to ensure adherence to all local regulations and import/export restrictions.

When asked about future flights, Markus explained that this was difficult to predict. "One of the most exciting, and demanding, parts of my job is that I cannot say what flights will be needed tomorrow. This is because so many of our projects require action and planning at a very short notice. However, this is all the more reason we appreciate the flexibility and close collaboration that has become a cornerstone of our partnership with Swiss WorldCargo."

Conclusion

Partnerships with different organizations and supporting regions in crisis have always formed a core part of our DNA. Whether it is to support earthquake relief efforts or refugee organizations, Swiss WorldCargo has frequently transported goods to help aid local efforts and support different NGOs, governments and people worldwide. With this background, Swiss WorldCargo is proud to have been able to support the ongoing fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. In many ways, our tag "Donated by Switzerland" has become synonymous with providing goods that help populations locally and aid in relief efforts. In our collaboration with the Swiss government, we are also proud that we have been able to play a vital role in Switzerland's support efforts abroad.



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