

# Denel Cheetahs flying high In Ecuador

All 12 of the South African Cheetah supersonic fighters sold to Ecuador have successfully completed their test flights and are now ready for deployment by the Ecuadorian air force.



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Riaz Saloojee, the group chief executive of Denel, says the sale of the 10 Cheetah C (single seat) and two Cheetah D (dual seat) planes is now complete and has been delivered to the complete satisfaction of the client.

Denel Aviation will continue to provide a comprehensive maintenance and support service to the Ecuadorian Air Force (FAE) for the next five years with an option for renewal.

"This is an exciting business opportunity for Denel Aviation," says Saloojee. "We successfully sold a fighter plane that was designed in South Africa and used locally for many years to a major international client.

"Our future partnership with the Ecuadorian Air Force will provide an important platform to showcase local capabilities for maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) work to the rest of the world," says Saloojee.

## Delivered in four batches

Mike Kgobe, the CEO of Denel Aviation says the agreement to deliver the 12 fighters was signed in the Ecuadorian capital, Quito, in November 2010. The government of Ecuador decided to purchase the Cheetahs as part of a programme to modernise its aircraft fleet.

The Cheetahs were delivered in four batches with the final shipment completed earlier this year. Prior to dispatching the aircraft, they were returned to service and flight-tested before being disassembled locally for shipment and then carefully reassembled and flight-tested in Ecuador.

Denel Aviation provided technical and logistics support to the local teams conducting the tests in Ecuador. Ecuadorian pilots and ground support staff also received extensive conversion training to fly and maintain the Cheetahs.

"All the stringent tests have now been completed and the Cheetahs were declared ready for operational deployment," says Kgobe.

## A milestone

Kgobe says a significant milestone was reached on 17 May 2012 when seven of the fighters took to the Ecuadorian skies simultaneously during a flypast to mark the handover of command of the country's air force to Brigadier General Enrique Velasco.

Denel Aviation is the design authority of the single-seat fighter that was locally developed as a variant of the Mirage III in the 1980s. The Denel Cheetahs were retired from active duty following the acquisition by South Africa of its new fleet of Saab Gripen fighter jets.

Negotiations between Denel Aviation, Armscor and the FAE started in 2009. An Ecuadorian team visited South Africa in April 2010 to inspect the Cheetah fleet and to participate in specific evaluation flights.

Denel Aviation subsequently visited FAE facilities to review the infrastructure and technical capability of the Ecuadorian Air



Force to accommodate the Cheetah aircraft, to evaluate the level of support required and to identify the need for further training.

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