

Office of Internal Oversight Services

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

AUDIT REPORT

Air operations in UNAMA

Overall results relating to effective management of air operations in UNAMA were initially assessed as partially satisfactory. Implementation of three important recommendations remains in progress.

FINAL OVERALL RATING: PARTIALLY SATISFACTORY

8 June 2012

Assignment No. AP2011/630/03

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AUDIT REPORT

Air operations in UNAMA

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of air operations in the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).

2. In accordance with its mandate, OIOS provides assurance and advice on the adequacy and effectiveness of the United Nations internal control system, the primary objectives of which are to ensure (a) efficient and effective operations; (b) accurate financial and operational reporting; (c) safeguarding of assets; and (d) compliance with mandates, regulations, and rules.

3. The Aviation Section provided air support to UNAMA's operations. UNAMA's aviation fleet included five fixed-wing and six rotary-wing aircraft. The air assets were used for transporting passengers, cargo, medical evacuations, and back-up for search and rescue operations. In 2010, UNAMA transported 22,681 passengers and 452 metric tons of cargo, and in 2011, transported 28,310 passengers and 549 metric tons of cargo. The air asset utilization rate in 2010 was 92.9 per cent and in 2011 was 93.2 per cent. There were 10 airfields and 25 helipads designated as frequently used landing sites. In addition, over 10 landing sites were periodically used.

4. The Aviation Section was headed by a Chief Aviation Officer at the P-4 level who reported to the Chief of Mission Support through the Chief Technical Services. The Chief Aviation Officer was supported by a team of 35 staff including five international staff, four United Nations volunteers, four national professional officers and 22 national staff. The Aviation Section was comprised of the Air Operations Unit, the Air Terminal Unit and the Technical Compliance Unit. The Aviation Safety Unit was headed by a Mission Aviation Safety Officer (MASO) who reported directly to the Chief of Mission Support, and was assisted by a National Aviation Safety Officer.

5. Flight operations in UNAMA had significantly increased since 2010 due to high security concerns for road transportation. UNAMA's flight hours increased from 3,766 in 2009 to 5,626 in 2010 and 6,782 hours in 2011. UNAMA's air operations allotted budgets of the financial years 2010 and 2011 were \$43.6 million and \$101.1 million, respectively.

6. Comments provided by UNAMA are incorporated in *italics*.

II. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

7. The audit of air operations was conducted to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of UNAMA's governance, risk management and control processes in providing reasonable assurance regarding the **effective management of air operations**.

8. The audit was included in the 2011 OIOS risk-based work plan due to the high risk nature of air operations in peacekeeping missions.

9. The key controls tested for the audit were: (a) project management; (b) regulatory framework; and (c) safety and security programmes. For the purpose of this audit, OIOS defined these key controls as follows:

(a) **Project management** - controls that provide reasonable assurance that there is sufficient project management capacity in the Aviation Section to effectively manage air operations to achieve the Mission's mandates.

(b) **Regulatory framework** - controls that provide reasonable assurance that policies and procedures exist and are implemented to effectively manage air operations.

(c) **Safety and security programmes** - controls that provide reasonable assurance that requisite safety and security programmes are implemented by the Mission to ensure the safety of staff, passengers and assets.

10. The key controls were assessed for the control objectives shown in Table 1.

11. OIOS conducted this audit from October 2011 to January 2012. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2011.

12. OIOS conducted an activity-level risk assessment to identify and assess specific risk exposures, and to confirm the relevance of the selected key controls in mitigating associated risks. Through interviews, analytical reviews and tests of controls, OIOS assessed the existence and adequacy of internal controls and conducted necessary tests to determine their effectiveness.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

13. UNAMA's governance, risk management and control processes examined were **partially satisfactory** in providing reasonable assurance regarding the **effective management of air operations**. OIOS made four recommendations to address issues identified in the audit. UNAMA had developed aviation support plans that were up-dated to provide adequate logistical support. UNAMA was planning to provide further training and tools to aviation staff to fulfill their functions more effectively. Also, while the scheduling and cost of special flights was a concern, procedures to ensure better scrutiny of justification were implemented. Measures to mitigate aviation hazards and fire safety risks needed to be further strengthened, and action was being taken in that regard.

14. The initial overall rating was based on the assessment of key controls presented in Table 1 below. The final overall rating is **partially satisfactory** as implementation of three important recommendations remains in progress.

Table 1 Assessment of key controls

	Key controls	Control objectives			
		Efficient and effective operations	Accurate financial and operational reporting	Safeguarding of assets	Compliance with mandates, regulations and rules
Effective management of air operations	(a) Project management	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory
	(b) Regulatory framework	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory
	(c) Safety and security programmes	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory
FINAL OVERALL RATING: PARTIALLY SATISFACTORY					

A. Project management

Support plans were developed and updated during 2010 and 2011

15. The Aviation Section developed and updated aviation support plans for the years 2010 and 2011 in line with the Mission's operational plan for logistical support and its mandated aviation tasks. Annual work plans were derived from the aviation support plans that outlined the tasks and expected accomplishments for each sub-unit. These plans were reviewed periodically by the Chief Aviation Officer to ensure effective implementation.

Lack of adequate resources in the regions

16. The Department of Field Support (DFS) in its 2011 aviation safety assistance visit report stated that staffing resources in the UNAMA Aviation Section were inadequate at the current approved level of 36 posts. To address this, seven staff from other sections were loaned to the Aviation Section. However, these staff did not have the requisite skills to adequately support air operations. For example, at regional locations, security and administrative staff were assigned responsibilities such as providing meteorological updates and firefighting. Also, in Mazar-e-Sharif and Herat, an Aviation Assistant performed multiple tasks, many concurrently, including pre-flight briefings to crew members, meteorological updates, overseeing refueling of aircraft, checking-in passengers and handling cargo.

17. Due to inadequate meteorological equipment, staff relied on the internet, weather forecasts from air traffic control, and/or personal judgement for forecasting weather conditions. Secondary weather information may have been inaccurate or outdated exposing the Mission to aviation hazards. The Chief Aviation Officer stated that 35 portable weather stations had been purchased for field offices to ensure accuracy of meteorological data for air operations.

Lack of adequate training for aviation staff

18. Aviation staff should have received on-the-job and developmental aviation training. However, 12 of 38 staff (42 per cent) assigned responsibilities for air operations did not receive training on handling of dangerous goods, aviation refresher courses and other specialized aviation training.

19. A training needs assessment to determine specific training requirements for staff had not been prepared. The Chief Aviation Officer stated that budget cuts had adversely affected the annual training programme for aviation staff, but a training needs assessment was planned for 2012.

(1) UNAMA should ensure that there are adequately trained aviation staff members assigned to regions with the requisite tools to perform their functions effectively. Also, all aviation staff should receive the necessary specialized training to keep their skills up-to-date.

UNAMA accepted recommendation 1, and stated that a comprehensive training database would be developed to assist in assessing training needs of staff. For 2012, two refresher courses and two in-house specialized courses would be organized. Training would be supplemented by the International Air Transport Association-facilitated specialized training courses. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence that adequate training has been provided to staff working on air operations to enable them to perform their functions effectively.

Processing of special flight requests needs to be strengthened

20. Special flight requests were prioritized based on urgency, nature of activity, requirement and destination accessibility. UNAMA processed 237 special flight requests to support the reconciliation process, joint missions to field offices and security assessment visits, as well as to facilitate staff movement from Kabul to the regions. A review of 30 special flights identified inefficiencies of about \$315,500, as follows:

- Obsolete and damaged information and communication equipment was air-lifted from Mazar-e-Sharif to Kabul costing about \$42,000. Transportation by road, which is possible taking into consideration the security situation, would have cost about \$1,400.
- Seven special flights were operated at a cost of \$274,680 for staff travelling for training in Kabul, returning to the duty station, or proceeding to other missions after leave. Staff training and movement of staff should have been scheduled to coincide with regular scheduled flights.

(2) UNAMA should limit the number of special flights by: (a) strengthening the procedures over approving additional flights; and (b) ensuring that staff traveling for training and other reasons make use of regular scheduled flights.

UNAMA accepted recommendation 2, and stated that effective 1 May 2012, all special flight requests were subjected to strict scrutiny by the Chief Technical Compliance, Chief Air Operation Center, Chief Aviation Officer and the Chief of Technical Services prior to approval by the Chief of Mission Support. Staff travelling on training and other official business was advised to utilize regularly scheduled flights. Based on the action taken by UNAMA, recommendation 2 has been closed.

B. Regulatory framework

Delays in cost recovery of aviation services provided to other agencies

21. During 2010 and 2011, UNAMA provided air transportation services on a cost reimbursable basis to members of the United Nations Country Team, non-government organizations and other agencies valued at \$1.6 million. There were delays of up to seventeen months in recovering the cost of air transportation services provided. For example, as of 31 December 2011, eight cases totaling \$518,061 were outstanding. Two of them, totaling \$338,426, were subsequently absorbed by the Mission, as they were re-classified as mandated activities. For four cases, recoveries of \$163,841 were affected by the end of January 2012, and the remaining two cases totaling \$15,794 were still outstanding. In March 2012, UNAMA had started recording dates (three weeks from the date of invoicing) for which payments should be made. Also, a staff member had been assigned to reconcile the data on cost recovery with actual recoveries. OIOS assessed that the new procedure was satisfactory.

Search and rescue plan was not updated since June 2009

22. In June 2009, the search and rescue (SAR) plan was developed by the Aviation Section in consultation with the International Security Assistance Force (led by NATO). The SAR exercise was conducted in November 2010; however, due to inadequate staffing resources, the plan was not updated to reflect lessons learned from the exercise. Also, due to a change in the fleet composition and rotation of the International Security Assistance Force staff in Afghanistan, important fleet data and staff members'

contact details were outdated. UNAMA revised the SAR, and OIOS verified that it had been up-dated as required.

C. Safety and security programmes

Taxiway adjacent to UNAMA helipad in Mazar-e-Sharif needs immediate repair

23. In Mazar-e-Sharif, the old taxiway adjacent to the new UNAMA air terminal and helipad had ditches with loose gravel which could have been hazardous to the safety of passengers and air assets. Also, contrary to the DFS Aviation Safety Manual, a disabled aircraft was parked close to the taxiway.

(3) UNAMA should coordinate with the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority to repair the taxiway and remove the disabled aircraft parked near the UNAMA helipad in Mazar-e-Sharif.

UNAMA accepted recommendation 3, and stated that repairs to the taxiway would be completed. UNAMA had contacted the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority to remove the disabled aircraft. Meanwhile, UNAMA reviewed the flight pattern during takeoff and landing, and advised the helicopter crew to avoid flying close to the disabled aircraft. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence that the taxiway adjacent to the UNAMA helipad has been adequately repaired.

Aviation fire safety risks during flight operations were not adequately mitigated

24. For firefighting, UNAMA relied on the rescue and firefighting services of the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority and the International Security Assistance Force. UNAMA provided fire extinguishers at some airfields/helipads including Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif for use by its staff as a fire safety measure during the refueling of the aircraft and engine start-up. At Kabul, the UNAMA Aviation Fire Marshal provided fire safety coverage during refueling of aircraft, but no appropriate firefighting gear and protective clothing. Also, the fire safety coverage at regional offices was not done for fire prevention due to the number of tasks assigned to the one person available during aircraft landing and departure.

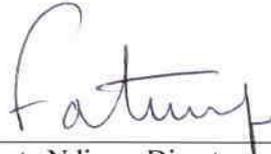
25. Moreover, fire safety plans for nine airfields used by UNAMA aircraft were not developed to ensure procedures were in place to mitigate aviation fire safety risks.

(4) UNAMA should ensure that aviation fire safety risks during aviation operations are adequately mitigated by developing fire safety plans and providing adequate firefighting capacity.

UNAMA accepted recommendation 4 and stated that it would mitigate fire safety risks at UNAMA-owned helicopter landing sites in coordination with its Fire Safety Unit. Fire safety plans for nine airfields and helicopter landing sites had been developed. Additional fire extinguishers would be provided at five locations, and fire protection clothing would be issued. Fire safety, prevention and firefighting training would be provided at seven locations. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of evidence that fire extinguishers and safety clothing has been provided and adequate training in fire safety and prevention has been delivered.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

26. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the Management and staff of UNAMA for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.



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STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of air operations in UNAMA

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / important ²	C/ O ³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁴
1	UNAMA should ensure that there are adequately trained aviation staff members assigned to regions with the requisite tools to perform their functions effectively. Also, all aviation staff should receive the necessary specialized training to keep their skills up-to-date.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that adequate training have been provided to staff working on air operations to enable them to perform their functions effectively.	31 December 2012
2	UNAMA should limit the number of special flights by: (a) strengthening the procedures over approving additional flights; and (b) ensuring that staff traveling for training and other reasons make use of regular scheduled flights.	Important	C	Action taken.	Implemented
3	UNAMA should coordinate with the Afghanistan Civil Aviation Authority to repair the taxiway and remove the disabled aircraft parked near the UNAMA helipad in Mazar-e-Sharif.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that taxiway adjacent to the UNAMA helipad has been adequately repaired.	31 August 2012
4	UNAMA should ensure that aviation fire safety risks during aviation operations are adequately mitigated by developing fire safety plans and providing adequate firefighting capacity.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that fire extinguishers and safety clothing has been provided and adequate training in fire safety and prevention has been delivered.	31 August 2012

1 Critical recommendations address significant and/or pervasive deficiency or weakness in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

2 Important recommendations address important deficiencies or weaknesses in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

3 C = closed, O = open

4 Date provided by UNAMA in response to recommendations.