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PROCEDURES FOR HANDLING PASSENGERS IN HIGH RISK TRANSIT LOCATIONS

Background

Despite continuous efforts to improve aviation safety in general and ensure adequate measures to mitigate risks associated with aviation security (AVSEC) in UNHAS operations, there have been cases of abduction or detention of some passengers while travelling on UNHAS flights from government-held areas to IO-held areas and vice versa; especially during transits. Such occurrences have been attributed to the tribal or political affiliation of those passengers, who are mainly South Sudanese.

Although UNHAS adopts a rigorous system to obtain appropriate mission clearances (termed *Flight Safety Assurances and security clearances*) from relevant local authorities before launching all flights, this approach has not proven fool-proof owing to the complexity of the operational context in South Sudan and the fluidity with which locations change hands between belligerent parties. It is therefore imperative that, in addition to routine methods used to conduct operations, special procedures are established to handle passengers in high risk locations to mitigate the risk against their abduction or detention and, when such situations inevitably occur, appropriate measures are taken to safeguard the lives of such individuals.

Purpose

These procedures are formulated to assist the handling of passengers in a safe, timely and coordinated fashion in the event that they are abducted or detained while travelling on UNHAS flights. The purpose is to ensure the following:

- i. Protection of lives;
- ii. Assignment of responsibilities;
- iii. Identification of resources for immediate response;

Applicability

The document shall apply to occurrences related to abduction or detention of passengers on UNHAS and other WFP-chartered flights under the following conditions only:

- i. During transit at locations published in the UNHAS Daily Flight Schedule;
- ii. During abrupt diversions necessitated by aircraft technical problems, adverse weather conditions and deteriorating security situations.

The procedures shall be applied in conjunction with guiding UNHAS operational documents such as ICAO regulations, UNAVSTADS, UNHAS SAOP and relevant flight/route manuals of contracted operators. Flights that remain overnight at locations outside the aircraft operational base shall not apply under these procedures if such “overnight stops” are pre-planned and communicated to passengers before departure.

Responsibilities

As a common service provider, WFP/UNHAS does not inquire about the tribal or political affiliation of passengers. Nevertheless, it is encouraged that a passenger, who may deem himself/herself at risk to security threats, notifies UNHAS to avoid compromising the safety of crew and other passengers.

- i. Aircrew: In addition to the standard in-flight procedures such as passenger briefing, two-way communication with WFP Flight Following etc., crew shall announce all transits, re-routing and diversions to passengers as soon as operationally possible without prejudice to the principal objective of “controlling the aircraft first”. Such announcements shall include the revised route, expected elapsed time, and will specifically remind passengers to tell the crew if they feel they might be at risk landing at a particular location.
- ii. WFP/UNHAS: As the service provider, WFP/UNHAS will undertake the following in the case of an incident:
 - Inform the appropriate focal point of the user organization whose personnel are affected by the incident;
 - Immediately inform the HC, UNDSS, OCHA and other relevant humanitarian stakeholders of the incident and continuously coordinate with such office(s) on finding a solution;
 - In coordination with HC/UNDSS/OCHA, negotiate with appropriate national authorities for solution as may be appropriate;
 - UNHAS will observe a waiting time of one hour on ground to enable departure with the affected passengers if negotiation is successful within the time period. Such a time will allow UNHAS to ensure that UNDSS, HC and OCHA have taken charge of the negotiation, if waiting time elapses.
 - If practical, arrange for accommodation, meals and transport for the affected passengers on full cost-recovery basis.
 - Arrange the relocation of passengers whose life may be deemed to be in danger and the extraction, evacuation or relocation of passengers in coordination with relevant national authorities.

While carrying out these functions, WFP/UNHAS will be exercising its moral imperative and act in good faith to ensure the safety of passengers only. WFP/UNHAS is not an air carrier and will not be legally bound to exercise the obligations of an Air Operator’s Certificate holder (AOC holder);

- iii. UNDSS: In its capacity, UNDSS shall, in liaison with the HC, WFP and other security focal points endeavor to negotiate with concerned national authorities and other relevant institutions for the prompt release of the affected passengers, crew, aircraft and all UN assets that may be directly or indirectly affected. Using its expertise, UNDSS will advise WFP/UNHAS on any potential risks and recommend actions, if applicable;



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- iv. User Organizations: In line with UNHAS SAOP, it is the ultimate responsibility of user organizations to ensure the security of its staff. Consequently, organizations should always balance mission criticality with personnel safety, bearing in mind their background (political, tribal, religious, cultural, etc.) before nominating them for travels that may warrant the use of UNHAS aircraft. Additionally, the user organization shall be responsible for the following:
- Ensure security clearances, visas and all other requisite authorizations are obtained from appropriate authorities and upon notification of abduction or detention, provide copies upon request;
 - Promptly notify WFP/UNHAS of any information that may put the life of its staff (and other occupants of the aircraft) at risk;
 - Provide accommodation, transport and meals to its staff or, in lieu, reimburse the full cost thereof to WFP/UNHAS or any such organization that may offer such assistance.
 - Coordinate and cooperate with WFP/UNHAS, UNDSS or any other such organization that may be at the forefront of negotiation with local authorities, to align in one voice.