



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2026/017

Audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters

DOS needed to strengthen the arrangement for operational independence of the aviation safety function and take appropriate measures to ensure comprehensive implementation of its responsibilities, including a review of the function's staffing

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Audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters (UNHQ). The objective of the audit was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of aviation safety oversight and management conducted at UNHQ. The audit covered the period from January 2023 to June 2025 and included a review of: (a) governance and oversight of the management of aviation safety; and (b) aviation safety management.

The Department of Operational Support (DOS) established the Aviation Safety Section (AvSS) to oversee all aviation safety-related matters in the Secretariat and rolled out the iAviationSafety platform in January 2020, that enables aviation-related personnel to collect, analyze, compare, forecast, and share safety-related data in real time. However, significant staffing constraints and inadequate arrangement for operational independence of the aviation safety function impacted the effective and efficient oversight and management of aviation safety. Also, there were gaps in the functioning of the Safety Review Board as a governance mechanism. Furthermore, existing aviation safety policies and guidelines were outdated; high-level aviation safety-related risks were not captured in the DOS risk register; the iAviationSafety database was not effectively utilized to monitor the status of related recommendations; and annual aviation safety assessment visits to oversee aviation operations in field missions were not being carried out.

OIOS made 11 recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, DOS needed to:

- Strengthen the functioning of the Safety Review Board and enhance the effective performance of its responsibilities.
- Enhance the operational independence of the aviation safety function.
- Expedite the finalization of the draft aviation manual.
- Include aviation security elements in the aviation safety statement.
- Implement measures to ensure key aviation safety responsibilities are effectively carried out, including an assessment of the adequacy of AvSS' staffing to address the workload and risks related to aviation safety operations in the Secretariat.
- Commission a review by the International Civil Aviation Organization to assess the status of air safety operations in the Secretariat.
- Document the results of the pilot project to monitor high aviation risks, and integrate high aviation safety risks into the enterprise risk management process.
- Update criteria for nominating staff to conduct aviation accident investigations to enhance objectivity of the investigations, and procedures to timely complete accident investigations and monitor implementation of their recommendations.
- Adopt a risk-based approach to conduct aviation safety assessment visits to ensure adequate safety management.

- Enhance the utilization of the iAviationSafety database; and, in coordination with field missions, establish a process to regularly review and update user access rights to protect the confidentiality of aviation safety data.

The Department of Safety and Security (DSS) needed to:

- Update its aviation security management system to clarify aviation security roles and responsibilities.

DOS accepted eight recommendations and DSS accepted its recommendation and both entities had initiated actions to implement their accepted recommendations.

DOS did not accept the recommendations on enhancing the operational independence of AvSS and on implementing measures to ensure key aviation safety responsibilities are effectively carried out. OIOS review showed that the current organizational structure could dilute AvSS' operational independence and compromise the effectiveness of its oversight activities. Furthermore, the staffing shortfall of the aviation safety function resulted in aviation risks not being adequately mitigated to ensure acceptable levels of safety performance for aviation operations. OIOS therefore reiterates these unaccepted recommendations, which may be reported to the General Assembly in the next OIOS annual report.

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Audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters (UNHQ).

2. The Secretariat's aviation fleet comprises a diverse mix of military and commercial/civilian aircraft, which include 486 aircraft (40 fixed-wing, 89 rotary wing, and 357 UAVs/RPASs¹) operating in 14 field mission locations - 8 peacekeeping missions (PKMs) and 6 special political missions (SPMs), as of June 2025. The corresponding budget and expenditure for these operations are shown in table 1.

**Table 1: Budget and expenditure for aviation operations in field missions from January 2023 to July 2025
(in thousands of United States dollars)**

Type of operation	Type of field mission	2023		2024		2025 (as of 31 July 2025)	
		Budget	Expenditure	Budget	Expenditure	Budget	Expenditure
Field mission air operations	PKMs	584,922	494,978	566,671	482,677	473,806	389,052
	SPMs	55,440	42,804	45,609	32,008	35,737	15,810
Troop travel	PKMs/SPMs	116,692	152,460	137,000	130,514	115,730	105,433
Total		757,054	690,242	749,280	645,199	625,273	510,295

Source: FOFD/OPPFB/DMSPC² records

3. The Under-Secretary-General (USG) for Operational Support is primarily responsible, as the Accountable Officer,³ for aviation safety management in the United Nations Secretariat. The Aviation Safety Section (AvSS) within the Office of Supply Chain Management (OSCM) in the Department of Operational Support (DOS) is the lead on aviation safety management in the Secretariat. It is responsible for: (a) setting standards, processes and procedures for aviation safety in line with international standards and United Nations requirements; (b) monitoring safety in aviation operations; (c) assessing safety risks; (d) conducting safety assurance activities; (e) providing oversight of aviation safety staff in field missions; and (f) providing capacity-building through training and awareness-raising.

4. AvSS comprises the Aviation Safety Team at UNHQ in New York, and the Regional Aviation Safety Office (RASO) at the United Nations Global Service Centre (UNGSC) in Brindisi. While the Section had nine approved posts, it was operating with four staff as of November 2025, with two staff each at UNHQ and UNGSC. At the time of the audit, the Section was headed by an Officer-in-Charge, who reported directly to the Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) of OSCM, DOS.

5. In January 2020, AvSS rolled out the iAviationSafety database to automate, integrate and manage all aspects of DOS aviation safety management, supporting all critical safety-related activities, including sharing of information in real-time, enabling a proactive and predictive safety approach, and enhancing aviation accident prevention efforts across the Secretariat's aviation operations. The system consists of a mobile application for data collection and a SharePoint-based platform for recording and processing safety

¹ Unmanned aerial vehicle/remotely piloted aircraft system

² Field Operations Finance Division (FOFD), Office of Programme Planning, Finance and Budget (OPPFB), Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance (DMSPC)

³ The accountable officer is the senior individual who has ultimate responsibility for the implementation and maintenance of an organization's aviation safety management system

data and tracking the implementation of safety recommendations. As of October 2025, access to the iAviationSafety database had been granted to 530 users in 18 Secretariat entities.

6. The management of aviation safety at the United Nations is governed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards and recommended practices (SARPs), the United Nations Aviation Standards (AVSTADS), and the United Nations aviation safety-related policies, guidelines and manuals.

7. Comments provided by DOS and the Department of Safety and Security (DSS) are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

8. The objective of the audit was to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of aviation safety oversight and management conducted at UNHQ.

9. This audit was included in the 2025 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the high operational and reputational risks related to aviation operations.

10. OIOS conducted this audit from September to November 2025. The audit covered the period from January 2023 to June 2025 and focused on: (a) governance and oversight of the management of aviation safety; and (b) aviation safety management.

11. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel; (b) review of relevant documentation; (c) assessment of data management systems, including the iAviationSafety database; (d) review of data on governance, oversight and overall management of aviation safety; (e) sample testing of aviation safety data, and assessment and performance reports from the iAviationSafety database; and (f) focus group discussions with aviation safety officers in seven sampled field missions (MINUSCA, MONUSCO, UNMISS, UNSOS, UNISFA, UNSMIL and UNMHA).⁴ These missions were selected based on their relative size, operational complexity, scope of air operations, and the rate of aviation-related accidents and incidents.

12. To assess the reliability of data pertaining to aviation safety oversight and management, OIOS: (a) reviewed the iAviationSafety database to identify potential inaccuracies and gaps in completeness; (b) reviewed related documentation, including aviation safety assessment and performance reports; and (c) collaborated with DOS personnel to identify and address any data-related issues. Discrepancies such as missing data, duplicate records, or data entry errors were communicated to DOS. Based on the review, OIOS determined that the data was sufficiently reliable to address audit objectives.

13. The audit was conducted in accordance with the Global Internal Audit Standards.

⁴ Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS), United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA), United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL), and the United Nations Mission to support the Hudaydah Agreement (UNMHA).

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Governance and oversight over the management of aviation safety

Need to strengthen the functioning of the Safety Review Board

14. An effective governance structure is crucial for aviation safety management to provide strategic direction, clear accountability and oversight for effective mitigation of risks and promotion of an aviation safety culture.

15. DOS established the Safety Review Board (SRB), chaired by ASG OSCM, with membership comprising heads of divisions and sections within OSCM. The Board is responsible for: (a) establishing Secretariat-wide aviation safety objectives, targets and safety performance indicators; (b) determining acceptable safety performance levels; (c) endorsing annual aviation safety statements; and (d) monitoring organizational safety performance. DOS also established the Aviation Safety Committee (ASC), chaired by Chief AvSS, and comprising representatives of OSCM sections and units at the technical level, to: (a) analyze and review safety concerns and accident and investigation reports, make appropriate safety recommendations, and follow up on their implementation; (b) establish safety procedures and guidelines; and (c) discuss change management processes, and assess the impact of operational changes.

16. The effectiveness of SRB and ASC was hindered by the following:

- (a) The Accountable Officer was not an SRB member, limiting to some extent the Accountable Officer's direct visibility over aviation risks and related mitigation measures. The annual DOS aviation safety statements, containing the Secretariat's safety objectives, targets and safety performance indicators, were also not endorsed by the Accountable Officer to demonstrate top-management commitment to actively managing safety risks.
- (b) SRB met twice annually, but its deliberations did not include or result in: (i) specific action plans to address serious safety issues despite increased rates of aviation accidents and serious incidents; and (ii) follow-up on the implementation of safety-related recommendations, or investigations of aviation-related accidents.
- (c) Due to staffing constraints, the ASC was not functional, as the limited AvSS staff responsible for data extraction, analysis and meeting preparation were engaged with other urgent priorities. Between January 2023 and June 2025, the ASC met only once, despite a requirement of five meetings over the period. As a result, analysis of safety concerns and safety recommendations to mitigate related risks were not prepared for consideration at SRB meetings.
- (d) Neither the SRB nor ASC was consulted to deliberate on or assess the impact of significant operational changes affecting aviation safety management at UNHQ, such as the transfer of aviation safety-related functions and staffing resources from AvSS in June 2023.
- (e) The safety performance indicators endorsed by the SRB were inadequate and did not correctly portray entity-level safety performance. For example, indicators selected for review were related to the implementation of the mission aviation safety plan (e.g., number of aviation safety council meetings held), rather than those that would enable the Board to specifically monitor high risk areas that have the greatest likelihood of resulting in aviation accidents, as per ICAO guidelines. The safety performance indicator dashboard in the iAviationSafety database indicated that entities such as MINUSCA and UNMISS met their targets for managing aviation risks, despite recent trends

indicating high accident rates. Although the SRB monitored safety performance once a year, it did not conduct targeted review of entities' safety performance despite the high accident rates.

- (1) DOS should strengthen the functioning of the Safety Review Board by, inter alia, including the Accountable Officer for aviation safety as a member, and implementing mechanisms to enhance the effective performance of its responsibilities.**

DOS accepted recommendation 1 and stated that it would revise its procedures to ensure that the SRB is chaired by the USG for Operational Support, or a representative with delegated authority. The proposed approach will be updated in the revised aviation manual.

Need to enhance the operational independence of the aviation safety function

17. ICAO safety management standards require AvSS to maintain a direct reporting line to USG DOS, the Accountable Officer for aviation safety in the Secretariat. Direct reporting to the Accountable Officer is essential to ensure that safety concerns receive proper consideration, resources and authority for resolution. Lack of direct access to the Accountable Officer can limit senior leadership's visibility of safety risks, resulting in inadequately informed safety decisions.

18. Review of the approved organizational structure for DOS indicated that AvSS lacked a direct reporting line to the USG DOS. The Section reported to the ASG, OSCM, who also oversees operational units that are subject to AvSS oversight, such as the Air Transport Service (ATS), Movement Control Section, and aviation procurement. This could limit AvSS' operational independence within OSCM to perform core safety oversight and assurance activities objectively and effectively. Although AvSS reported to the Accountable Officer on an ad hoc basis, following accidents, the lack of a regular direct reporting line heightened the risk that critical safety control gaps in OSCM operational units may not be promptly escalated, leading to inadequately managed safety risks.

- (2) DOS should enhance the operational independence of the Aviation Safety Section to enable effective implementation of its oversight activities.**

DOS did not accept recommendation 2 and stated that the current structure included an independent functional line for the aviation safety team in accordance with the Secretary-General's management reform (A/72/492/Add. 2), which established the reporting line of AvSS to the ASG OSCM. The draft aviation manual, presently under review, retains the same reporting line. OIOS review showed that the current organizational structure, with the aviation safety function and air operations organizational units that are subject to AvSS oversight all reporting to ASG OSCM, could dilute AvSS' independence and compromise the effectiveness of its oversight activities. OIOS reiterates this unaccepted recommendation.

Need to update aviation safety and security-related policies and guidelines

19. ICAO SARPs and AVSTADS require DOS to develop and periodically review aviation safety and security-related policies and guidelines to ensure their continued relevance and appropriateness. However, OIOS review indicated inadequate aviation safety and security-related policies and guidelines, as highlighted below.

(a) Outdated aviation safety-related policies

20. DOS had not updated aviation safety policies and guidelines for several years as shown in table 2, resulting in guidance that contained roles, responsibilities and accountabilities assigned to organizational entities, structures and reporting lines that no longer exist.

Table 2: Status of DOS aviation safety-related policies and guidelines (as of October 2025)

No.	Name of policy/guideline	Type of guideline	Date issued	Date review due	Time elapsed (in years) since review was due
1	Aviation Safety Policy	Policy	May 2016	May 2019	6.4
3	Aviation Risk Management		June 2014	June 2016	9.3
4	Aviation Safety Assurance	Guidelines	Oct. 2017	Oct. 2019	6
5	Aviation Safety Training		Feb. 2016	Jan. 2018	7.8
6	United Nations Use of Unmanned Aircraft Systems Capabilities		Feb. 2019	Jan. 2020	5.8
7	Technical and Operational Evaluation Criteria		Feb. 2022	Feb. 2025	0.7
8	DOS Aviation Safety Programme		Jul. 2016	Jul. 2019	6.3
9	Aviation Safety Manual	Manuals	Mar. 2012	Mar. 2015	10.6
10	Military Aviation Unit Manual		Apr. 2021	Apr. 2026	N/A

Source: iSeek Knowledge Gateway platform

21. A revised draft aviation manual, incorporating all updated safety-related guidelines into a single document for ease of reference, has been pending finalization since August 2023. The delayed finalization was partly due to an attempt to merge AvSS with the Aviation Quality Assurance and Standards Unit, currently part of ATS. Best practice requires aviation safety to be independent of operations and to report directly to the Accountable Officer for aviation safety management.

22. The continued use of outdated safety policies and guidelines has resulted in: misalignment with ICAO SARPs and other regulatory requirements; reduced effectiveness of risk controls; increased gaps in global harmonization; delayed adoption of modern safety management practices and emerging technologies; and heightened exposure to systemic failures, operational errors, and accident precursors not addressed by obsolete provisions.

(b) Aviation security-related policy had not been developed

23. OIOS also noted that there was no aviation security policy to guide the management of aviation security, contrary to ICAO SARPs and despite the increasing number of such incidents in recent years. This resulted in accountability gaps in the management of aviation security-related incidents.⁵ Furthermore, DOS did not include aviation security-related elements in its aviation safety statement to provide an overview of how aviation security was being handled. DOS explained that it had included high-level references on aviation security in the draft aviation manual; however, the development of specific guidance on aviation security would require additional resources, and coordination with DSS to clarify the roles and responsibilities in the aviation security management system. DOS and DSS needed to take action to address these issues.

⁵ Aviation security-related incidents are malicious and intentional acts of unlawful interference involving threats such as hijacking, sabotage and terrorism.

- (3) DOS should expedite the finalization of the draft aviation manual, delineating safety-related roles, responsibilities and reporting lines.**

DOS accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the aviation manual was at the final stage of review.

- (4) DOS should include aviation security-related elements in the aviation safety statement to address safety and security issues effectively.**

DOS accepted recommendation 4 and stated that it would update the aviation safety statement and submit it for endorsement by the SRB at its next meeting.

- (5) DSS should update its aviation security management system to clarify aviation security roles and responsibilities.**

DSS accepted recommendation 5 and stated that it would clarify aviation security roles and responsibilities once it completes ongoing restructuring and reassessment of the types and levels of services it could provide due to budget reductions.

Need to implement measures to ensure aviation safety responsibilities are conducted effectively

24. An aviation safety function operating at full capacity is crucial for proactively identifying and mitigating risks, ensuring compliance with aviation safety standards and fostering an effective safety culture. As part of the implementation of United Nations management reforms in January 2019, General Assembly resolution 72/266B of July 2018 approved a new management architecture, which established a staffing capacity of nine posts within AvSS to perform all aviation safety-related functions. However, OIOS review noted that AvSS was not operating at full capacity, leading to challenges as highlighted below.

- (a) Staffing constraints significantly limited AvSS ability to perform its functions effectively

25. OIOS review noted that AvSS was operating at less than half of its approved capacity, with four of nine approved positions at the time of the audit (see table 3).

Table 3: Status of AvSS approved staffing capacity as of November 2025

Aviation Safety Team	Approved staffing	Staffing level	Actual status of the post	Remarks
AvSS UNHQ	1 x Chief AvSS	P5	Temporarily encumbered	Substantive staff transferred to ATS in August 2025 and replaced with an Officer-in-Charge
	1 x ASO	P4	Not available	Staff transferred to Enabling and Outreach Service (EOS) in June 2023, performing limited safety-related tasks, and with limited coordination with AvSS
	1 x ASO	P3	Encumbered	n/a
	1 x ASO	P3	Vacant	Staff retired in August 2023, and post moved to ATS in January 2025, although functions continued to be performed by AvSS
	1 x ASO	P3	Not available	Staff transferred to FCAS ⁶ in June 2023, with limited coordination with AvSS
	1 x GS Admin	GS6	Encumbered	n/a

⁶ Facilities and Commercial Activities Service in the Division of Administration

Aviation Safety Team	Approved staffing	Staffing level	Actual status of the post		Remarks
RASO UNGSC	1 x Chief RASO	P4	Vacant	Staff retired in May 2024	
	1 x ASO	P3	Encumbered	n/a	
	1 x GS Admin*	GS5	Encumbered**	Post excluded in the 2025/26 budget submission	

Source: AvSS staffing table

*Post shared 50% with Office of Director UNGSC

**Encumbered until December 2025

26. The reduction in staff capacity was partly due to the reconfiguration of AvSS in June 2023, meant to readjust and rebalance resources within OSCM, which resulted in the transfer of three staff members to other OSCM divisions and services. While some aviation safety-related functions were relocated, essential mandated functions such as providing safety advice to field missions, contributing to the development of safety-related policies and guidelines, and coordinating activities of RASO UNGSC, remained with AvSS, leading to a shortfall in staff coverage for these responsibilities. Also, prolonged delays in filling vacant posts further impacted on staff strength. For instance, it took over 15 months to select a candidate for a vacant post, who could not be on board before a recruitment freeze was imposed due to liquidity constraints.

27. Moreover, in August 2025, the Chief of AvSS was reassigned to another OSCM entity, and an Officer-in-Charge at the P4 level was temporarily assigned to lead the Section, contrary to ICAO and United Nations AVSTADS requirements, which stipulate that AvSS be led by a Chief at the P5 level due to the scope and complexity of United Nations aviation operations.

28. During the audit period, AvSS: (i) contributed to the development of the draft United Nations aviation manual; (ii) provided safety risk-based inputs to aviation procurement, and participated in the assessment of military aviation units as part of peacekeeping capability readiness system process; (iii) periodically provided briefings on the safety performance of military aviation units to permanent representatives of troop contributing countries, and senior management of DOS and the Department of Peace Operations; and (iv) coordinated efforts with the United Nations Operations and Crisis Centre and other key stakeholders as part of crisis response following aviation accidents. However, staffing constraints limited AvSS' ability to implement its annual work plan, with the limited staffing resources dedicated to addressing only high-priority, high-risk and time-sensitive matters. Consequently, the staffing shortfall contributed to the following weaknesses:

- i. AvSS review of safety data in the iAviationSafety database, as part of its oversight activities to field missions, was limited. For example, in 2024 and 2025, the Section did not review on average: (i) 97 per cent of field missions' aviation safety plans to determine their compliance with DOS safety requirements; and (ii) 86 per cent of initial aircraft inspection reports to verify adherence to contractual specifications and adequacy of risk mitigation measures.
- ii. Inadequate follow-up on the implementation of all safety recommendations, contributing to significant delays in their implementation. For example, the implementation of 87 (or 22 per cent) of 403 safety recommendations remained pending for almost 4 years, as of August 2025.
- iii. Training materials for essential courses like aviation risk management for senior managers and aircrew induction briefing have not been updated for two to seven years, making them outdated. Additionally, safety awareness promotional materials such as posters, calendars and brochures have not been created since May 2020.

- iv. Safety oversight of SPMs' aviation operations and the management of aviation security incidents have been done on an ad hoc basis.

29. The above weaknesses occurred despite a rising number of aviation-related incidents across the Secretariat. From January 2023 to July 2025, DOS recorded 63 serious incidents and 20 accidents, resulting in 38 injuries and 14 fatalities among United Nations personnel. The staffing shortfall in AvSS undermined the Section's ability to provide safety oversight proportionate to the scale and complexity of United Nations aviation activities and associated safety risks. This hindered proactive risk mitigation and contributed to the overall aviation safety performance falling significantly below the Organization's acceptable level of safety performance. With DOS expected to further reduce the Section's staffing levels in line with UN80 Initiative,⁷ this will further significantly affect AvSS's ability to perform its safety assurance and oversight functions effectively.

(b) Aviation safety-related functions were fragmented following the reconfiguration of AvSS

30. AvSS was mandated to oversee all matters related to United Nations aviation operations, including supporting the: (i) official travel of staff by providing safety-related recommendations on the use of commercial air operators and donated flights;⁸ and (ii) sourcing of United Nations aviation service vendors by conducting technical vendor clearance to determine the adequacy of their operational management and aviation control systems in meeting the United Nations' aviation requirements.

31. However, the reconfiguration of AvSS in June 2023 resulted in the transfer of the: (i) commercial air travel and donated flights clearance processes to the Facilities and Commercial Activities Service within the Division of Administration; and (ii) technical vendor clearance process to EOS in OSCM. This resulted in the following weaknesses:

- i. Inadequate coordination, resulting in a lack of information sharing. For example, the Technical Vendor Registration (TVR) Unit did not share the results of technical clearance assessments and related documentation with AvSS and relevant PKMs, citing confidentiality concerns, even though this information was needed by aviation staff to follow up on potential safety-related issues during initial aircraft inspections.
- ii. While the transferred functions were technical in nature, they were supervised by non-technical staff whose primary responsibilities were unrelated to aviation safety. In the absence of the required technical oversight from AvSS, gaps emerged in the implementation of these functions. For example, OIOS review of the technical vendor clearance assessments for 16 newly registered air operators during the audit period indicated that the TVR Unit did not review their safety records to verify compliance with United Nations safety standards.
- iii. Contrary to relevant procurement policies, the technical and financial clearance processes for vendor registration were conducted within the same Unit in EOS, resulting in inadequate segregation of duties.

32. The air safety function in the Secretariat has not undergone a review since one was conducted by ICAO in 2000. In light of the significant changes in the operating environment, the Organization would

⁷ In March 2025, the Secretary-General launched the UN80 Initiative to transform how the UN works - identifying efficiencies, reviewing how mandates are implemented, and examining potential structural changes and programme realignment within the United Nations system.

⁸ Donated flights are flights provided to one or more United Nations system-wide organizations for official travel in support of humanitarian service, joint mandate and/or other purposes at no cost to the relevant entity.

benefit from a review by ICAO to assess, inter alia, the staffing of AvSS, dispersion of air safety activities, and compliance with ICAO SARPs and United Nations policies and AVSTADS.

- (6) DOS should implement measures to ensure key aviation safety responsibilities of the Aviation Safety Section (AvSS) are effectively carried out, including an assessment of the adequacy of AvSS' staffing to address the workload and risks related to aviation safety operations in the Secretariat.**

DOS did not accept recommendation 6 and stated that the overall resources had been reviewed based on a scalability analysis led by DMSPC. Notwithstanding, DOS has requested the unfreezing of recruitment for one post in AvSS and will continue to take action within its scope to unfreeze recruitment for vacant AvSS posts. OIOS takes notes of scalability analyses in line with the ongoing Organizational reforms. However, OIOS was not provided with any evidence of DOS' assessment or analysis of the adequacy of AvSS' staffing to address the workload and risks related to aviation safety operations in the Secretariat. OIOS review showed that critical aviation risks were not adequately addressed to ensure acceptable levels of safety performance for aviation operations. OIOS reiterates this unaccepted recommendation.

- (7) DOS should commission a review by the International Civil Aviation Organization to assess the status of air safety operations in the Secretariat.**

DOS accepted recommendation 7 and stated that it had contacted ICAO to initiate an assessment of air safety operations and was working with ICAO for this to take place on a continuing basis. DOS also stated that it would submit a budget proposal to secure the necessary resources for carrying out the review, but emphasized that the implementation of the recommendation was contingent upon the availability of resources.

B. Aviation safety management

Need to enhance aviation risk management at Headquarters

33. ICAO SARPs require AvSS to identify hazards, assess associated risks, resolve safety issues and manage risks through established and sustained processes. However, the Section's risk management processes were not adequate. For example:

- (a) The Section's ability to proactively identify hazards and operational risks was impeded due to the limited number of safety assessments conducted due to budget constraints.
- (b) AvSS initiated a pilot project to monitor the five ICAO global high-risk categories⁹ that contribute most to aviation accidents. While its 2024 aviation safety annual report indicated that the project was completed in December 2024, interviews and reviews noted that AvSS had not prepared a project completion report to document the pilot project's outcomes, including lessons learned and next steps in monitoring these high risks.
- (c) Since October 2023, AvSS had not utilized the iAviationSafety platform to track and follow up on the implementation of safety recommendations and for reporting to DOS senior management, limiting their visibility on the adequacy and effectiveness of risk mitigation measures implemented to address safety concerns. This contributed to significant delays in implementing these

⁹ The ICAO five Global High-Risk Categories are: controlled flight into terrain, loss of control in-flight, mid-air collision, runway excursion, and runway incursion.

recommendations. For example, as of 31 July 2025, the implementation of 49 recommendations from aviation safety assessment visits (ASAV) had been pending for over five years, and 420 (or 15 per cent) of 2,763 corrective actions remained unresolved for an average of 254 days. DOS explained that this was due to the impact of the Organization's liquidity crisis. Additionally, unlike the Audit Response and Boards of Inquiry Section, AvSS did not periodically report to the Accountable Officer on the status of implementation of safety recommendations.

- (d) AvSS had also not reviewed or updated its risk register since October 2023 to ensure that safety risks were accurately documented, and risk mitigation measures remain effective.

34. Moreover, while the DOS 2025 risk register included aviation risks, OIOS noted that AvSS did not participate in the enterprise risk management process, which was limited to OSCM divisions and services headed by D1-level staff or above. As a result, the DOS risk register did not fully include all high aviation risks, such as security-related risks, even though it had recorded 11 serious security-related incidents and three accidents between January 2023 and July 2025, resulting in 15 injuries, four fatalities, and three other United Nations personnel held hostage. This resulted in DOS senior management not having complete visibility into aviation risks and the ability to proactively manage them. Additionally, field missions did not always manage aviation risks at the entity level. For example, only two of the sampled seven field missions included aviation risks in their risk registers.

(8) DOS should: (a) document the results of its pilot project to monitor high aviation risks, and outline the next steps for monitoring these risks; and (b) integrate high aviation safety risks into the enterprise risk management process at Secretariat and entity levels, as they are identified.

DOS accepted recommendation 8 and stated that it was in the process of documenting the results of the pilot project with the aim of establishing proactive risk mitigation measures. Additionally, DOS will assess aviation safety-related risks for potential inclusion in its risk register, as appropriate.

Need to strengthen aviation accident investigations

35. Timely accident investigations are crucial to identify root causes, strengthen safety culture, and prevent recurrence of aviation accidents and serious incidents. Prior to 2020, when a serious incident or accident occurred, ASG, OSCM nominated an aviation safety technical investigator (ASTI) within AvSS to conduct the investigation. However, since 2020, nominations to conduct investigations have been limited to aviation safety officers from field missions due to budget constraints.

36. OIOS noted several weaknesses in the investigation process:

- (a) Unlike AvSS staff, aviation safety officers in field missions did not have overall visibility into air operators' or military aviation units' performance and safety records in other missions, limiting their ability to conduct effective investigations within the required 4-week timeframe. The coordination of post-accident investigation activities, such as engaging senior United Nations officials or permanent representatives of troop-contributing countries at UNHQ, was also limited.
- (b) Investigations conducted by aviation safety officers from the same mission where an accident occurred raised concerns about objectivity, as these staff reviewed processes overseen by their supervisors.
- (c) Investigations were not always conducted into serious incidents, as required. For example, 10 of the 63 serious incidents that occurred during the audit period were not investigated.

- (d) Initial accident investigations were not always conducted promptly, averaging 14 weeks compared to the 4-week requirement stipulated in the OSCM investigations terms of reference. Furthermore, initial investigation reports were sometimes subjected to several revisions, prolonging their finalization. For example, it took over 17 months to finalize the investigation of an incident involving the transportation of dangerous goods on troop rotation flights by a wide-body commercial air operator.
- (e) Timelines and responsible staff/entities were not assigned for the implementation of investigation-related recommendations. Also, AvSS had not tracked accident investigation-related recommendations since August 2023, resulting in significant delays in their implementation. For example, the implementation of 46 (or 33 per cent) of 138 recommendations issued before August 2023 remained pending as of August 2025.

37. The above occurred because OSCM had not updated: (a) procedures to follow up on the investigation of all serious incidents and accidents; and (b) mechanisms to monitor the implementation of investigation recommendations. Furthermore, although the outdated Aviation Safety Manual provided minimum criteria for nominating ASTIs, this needed to be updated considering the current reporting structure following the establishment of DOS in January 2019.

(9) DOS should update: (a) criteria for nominating staff to conduct aviation accident investigations to enhance objectivity of the investigations; and (b) procedures to follow up on timely completion of accident investigations and monitor the implementation of investigation recommendations.

DOS accepted recommendation 9 and stated that the new DOS aviation manual would include updated criteria and procedures for ASTIs.

Need to adopt risk-based approach and prioritize resources to conduct safety assessment visits in field missions

38. United Nations aviation policies require AvSS to conduct one ASAV per year for each field mission with air assets to provide a detailed assessment of conditions and factors influencing safety management. These assessments form the basis for recommendations and risk mitigation measures to enhance aviation safety in field operations.

39. OSCM discontinued physical safety assessment visits in 2021, citing budget constraints. This followed ASAVs that were conducted remotely in 2020 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted travel to field mission locations. While remote ASAVs were more cost-effective, interviews indicated that physical visits were more effective, as they allowed direct observation of the operational environment, identification of safety gaps, and a broader assessment of activities. Also, interpersonal interaction facilitates a more comprehensive assessment.

40. The United Nations Board of Inquiry investigation conducted in December 2024 for three aviation-related accidents that occurred in MINUSCA between November 2023 and July 2024 found that the absence of ASAVs in recent years had contributed to unacceptably high and rising accident rates. Table 4 shows statistics on the number of serious incidents, accidents, accident rates and associated injuries, and deaths from 2020 to 2025.

Table 4: Number of serious incidents and accidents in field missions from 2020 to 2025 (as of July 2025)

Year	Serious incidents	Accidents	No. of injuries	No. of fatalities	Accident rate per 100,000 flying hours		
					Commercial aircraft	Military aircraft	Overall
2020	19	4	11	0	2.05	4.79	2.87
2021	22	2	4	0	0.00	3.88	1.23
2022	26	3	6	8	0.00	4.21	1.23
2023	16	8	16	5	3.76	20.80	8.28
2024	33	7	6	1	2.04	19.92	4.69
2025	14	5	16	8	9.28	24.32	13.44

Source: iAviationSafety database

41. In addition to injuries and death of United Nations personnel and reputational damage to the Organization, high accident rates also increase the financial cost of aviation operations through increased insurance premiums, compensation claims, and other operational costs, compared to the cost of ASAVs. For example, UNMISS incurred \$39.2 million to hire a temporary replacement aircraft fleet to meet operational demands during the 20-month suspension of a military aviation unit due to its high accident rates. OIOS analysis showed that four field missions accounted for 91 (70 per cent) of the 130 serious incidents and accidents, as well as 69 (or 85 per cent) of all injuries and fatalities (see table 5). AvSS had introduced enhanced safety monitoring mechanisms, whereby air operators or military aviation units involved in frequent accidents are required to meet specific safety performance indicators before they could be allowed to resume full operations. However, this is reactionary in nature.

Table 5: Field missions with the highest rates of serious incidents and accidents from 2020 to 2025 (as of July 2025)

Field mission	Serious incidents	Accidents	Injured personnel	Fatalities	Total flying hours	Accident rate per 100,000 flying hours
UNMISS	37	3	14	2	88,784	3.38
MONUSCO	27	10	5	9	63,374	15.78
MINUSCA	18	3	13	0	53,219	5.64
UNSOS	9	7	15	11	81,961	8.54

Source: iAviationSafety database

42. Given the current liquidity constraints, OIOS considers that a risk-based approach to conducting ASAVs and prioritizing budgetary resources would be more sustainable and effective. Prioritizing high-risk missions for assessment based on high accident rates or other factors such as high operational risks would enable AvSS to maximize the impact of limited resources while maintaining adequate safety oversight.

(10) DOS should adopt a risk-based approach to conduct aviation safety assessment visits to ensure adequate safety management.

DOS accepted recommendation 10 and stated that a risk-based approach to ASAVs had been included in the draft aviation manual, and AvSS had created a plan for 2026, starting with high-risk missions. However, implementation of the recommendation is contingent upon the availability of resources.

Need to enhance utilization of the iAviationSafety database and strengthen access control

43. Focus group discussions with staff in sampled field missions indicated that the iAviationSafety database was user-friendly and met their needs in collecting, analyzing and monitoring aviation data. While enhancements to the database's functionality were needed, incremental improvements were being made. For example, at the time of the audit, AvSS, in coordination with the Office of Information and Communications Technology, was migrating the database from its current SharePoint 2013 system to the latest Microsoft SharePoint. Also, plans were underway to: (a) link the iAviationSafety database to the contract performance reporting tool; (b) introduce a functionality to allow air operators and military aviation unit personnel to submit occurrence and hazard reports directly into the database, and (c) alert systems to track safety actions and reduce delays.

44. However, OIOS review noted that the utilization of the database was not optimal. For example, of the 530 registered users, 56 (11 per cent) had never used the system, 150 (28 per cent) had used it for less than an hour, and 254 users (48 per cent) had not logged in for 12 to 65 months. The average utilization rate of the database was 2.3 days. While some of these users might have left their respective entities or changed functions, necessitating the removal of their access rights, staff with aviation-related responsibilities may not be adequately leveraging the database in conducting their work. Additionally, interviews with AvSS staff indicated that the Section did not have a systematic mechanism to monitor the continued need to grant access to confidential safety data and information because relevant aviation safety offices in field missions were not notified when personnel changed functions or departed the missions. Protecting the confidentiality of aviation safety data is essential to prevent its misuse and improve safety culture.

(11) DOS should: (a) enhance the utilization of the iAviationSafety database by raising awareness of its functionalities and benefits to improve aviation operations; and (b) in coordination with field missions, establish a process to regularly review and update user access rights to protect the confidentiality of aviation safety data.

DOS accepted recommendation 11 and stated that it would issue a facsimile to missions to encourage the use of the iAviationSafety platform and take measures to ensure that user access rights are appropriately managed through regular updates to the platform.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

45. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of DOS and DSS for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹⁰ / Important ¹¹	C/ O ¹²	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ¹³
1	DOS should strengthen the functioning of the Safety Review Board by, inter alia, including the accountable officer for aviation safety as a member, and implementing mechanisms to enhance the effective performance of its responsibilities.	Important	O	Evidence of: (a) inclusion of the Accountable Officer or representative with delegated authority in the SRB, and (b) implementation of mechanisms for the effective performance of SRB responsibilities.	30 June 2027
2	DOS should enhance the operational independence of the Aviation Safety Section to enable effective implementation of its oversight activities.	Important	C	N/A	N/A
3	DOS should expedite the finalization of the draft aviation manual, delineating safety-related roles, responsibilities and reporting lines.	Important	O	Issuance of the finalized new Aviation Manual.	30 June 2027
4	DOS should include aviation security-related elements in the aviation safety statement to address safety and security issues effectively.	Important	O	Evidence of the inclusion of aviation security-related elements in the aviation safety statement.	31 December 2027
5	DSS should update its aviation security management system to clarify aviation security roles and responsibilities.	Important	O	Updated aviation security management system clarifying aviation security roles and responsibilities.	30 June 2028
6	DOS should implement measures to ensure key aviation safety responsibilities of the Aviation Safety Section (AvSS) are effectively carried out, including an assessment of the adequacy of AvSS'	Important	C	N/A	N/A

¹⁰ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

¹¹ Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

¹² Please note the value C denotes closed recommendations whereas O refers to open recommendations.

¹³ Date provided by DOS and DSS in response to recommendations.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹⁰ / Important ¹¹	C/ O ¹²	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ¹³
	staffing to address the workload and risks related to aviation safety operations in the Secretariat.				
7	DOS should commission a review by the International Civil Aviation Organization to assess the status of air safety operations in the Secretariat.	Important	O	Evidence of a review by ICAO assessing the status of air safety operations in the Secretariat.	30 June 2028
8	DOS should: (a) document the results of its pilot project to monitor high aviation risks, and outline the next steps for monitoring these risks; and (b) integrate high aviation safety risks into the enterprise risk management process at Secretariat and entity levels, as they are identified.	Important	O	Documentation on the results of the pilot projects to monitor high aviation risks, and DOS risk register updated with high aviation risks.	31 March 2027
9	DOS should update: (a) criteria for nominating staff to conduct aviation accident investigations to enhance objectivity of the investigations; and (b) procedures to follow up on timely completion of accident investigations and monitor the implementation of investigation recommendations.	Important	O	Updated criteria for nominating staff to conduct ASTIs, and evidence of follow-up on the status of implementation of aviation safety-related recommendations.	30 June 2027
10	DOS should adopt a risk-based approach to conduct aviation safety assessment visits to ensure adequate safety management.	Important	O	Evidence that DOS adopts a risk-based approach to conduct aviation safety assessment visits.	30 September 2027
11	DOS should: (a) enhance the utilization of the iAviationSafety database by raising awareness of its functionalities and benefits to improve aviation operations; and (b) in coordination with field missions, establish a process to regularly review and update user access rights to protect the confidentiality of aviation safety data.	Important	O	Evidence that DOS encourages the use of the iAviationSafety platform by missions, and that measures are in place to ensure user access rights are appropriately managed.	30 June 2027

APPENDIX I

Management Response

TO: Mr. Byung-Kun Min, Director
A: Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

DATE: 18 June 2026

REFERENCE: DOS-2026-01938

CLASSIFICATION: Confidential

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

FROM: Atul Khare, Under-Secretary-General
DE: for Operational Support



SUBJECT: **Draft report on an audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations**
OBJET: **Headquarters (Assignment No. AH2025-619-03)**

1. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the subject draft report. Please find attached comments from the Department of Operational Support and the Department of Safety and Security on the recommendations in Appendix I.
2. We appreciate the cooperation and collaboration with the Office of Internal Oversight Services and stand ready to provide any additional clarification that may be required.

cc: Gilles Michaud
Fatoumata Ndiaye
AnneMarie van den Berg
Marc Jacquand

Management Response

Audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	DOS should strengthen the functioning of the Safety Review Board by, inter alia, including the accountable officer for aviation safety as a member, and implementing mechanisms to enhance the effective performance of its responsibilities.	Important	Yes	Chief, Aviation Safety Section	30 June 2027	DOS will revise its procedures to ensure that the Safety Review Board (SRB) is chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Operational Support, or a representative with delegated authority. The proposed approach/procedure, which is currently under review, will be updated in the revised Aviation Manual.
2	DOS should enhance the operational independence of the Aviation Safety Section to enable effective implementation of its oversight activities.	Important	No	N/A	N/A	Based on the report of the Secretary General – Shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations: implementing a new management architecture for improved effectiveness and strengthened accountability (A/72/492/Add.2), paragraph 197: “<i>The Aviation Safety Team, which consists of aviation safety experts reporting directly to the Assistant Secretary-General, will oversee all matters related to United Nations aviation operations, including aircraft utilized for personnel and cargo movements and the official travel of staff.</i>” The draft Aviation Manual, which is presently under review, retains the same reporting line. The current structure features an established independent functional line in accordance with A/72/492/Add.2, paragraph 197.

¹ Critical recommendations address those risk issues that require immediate management attention. Failure to take action could have a critical or significant adverse impact on the Organization.

² Important recommendations address those risk issues that require timely management attention. Failure to take action could have a high or moderate adverse impact on the Organization.

Management Response

Audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ₂	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
32	DOS should expedite the finalization of the draft aviation manual, delineating safety-related roles, responsibilities and reporting lines.	Important	Yes	Assistant Secretary-General for Supply Chain Management	30 June 2027	The comments of DOS are reflected in the report.
43	DOS should include aviation security-related elements in the aviation safety statement to address safety and security issues effectively, and clarify aviation security responsibilities between DSS, the Air Transport Service and the Aviation Safety Section.	Important	Yes, if revised as requested	Chief, Aviation Safety Section	31 December 2027	DOS will update the aviation safety statement and submit it for endorsement by the Safety Review Board in its next meeting.
4	UNDSS should update its aviation security management system to clarify aviation security roles and responsibilities.	Important	Yes, if revised as requested	Chief, Specialized Service Branch	30 June 2028	UNDSS is currently restructuring due to additional budget reductions. Consequently, the Department is reassessing the types and levels of services it can provide. UNDSS will clarify aviation security roles and responsibilities once it completes its restructuring.
5	DOS should implement measures to ensure key aviation safety responsibilities of the Aviation Safety Section (AvSS) are effectively carried out, including an assessment of the adequacy of AvSS' staffing to address the workload and risks related to aviation safety operations in the Secretariat.	Critical	No	N/A	N/A	DOS reiterates that the overall resources had been reviewed, based on a scalability analysis that was led by DMSPC. DOS has requested the unfreezing of recruitment for one post in AvSS, and will continue to take actions, within its scope, to unfreeze recruitment for vacant AvSS posts.

Management Response

Audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ₂	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
65	DOS should commission a review by the International Civil Aviation Organization to assess the status of air safety operations in the Secretariat.	Important	Yes	Chief, Aviation Safety Section	30 June 2028	The comments of DOS are reflected in the report. The Department will submit a budget proposal to secure the necessary resources for carrying out the review. Consequently, the implementation of the recommendation is contingent upon the availability of these resources.
76	DOS should: (a) document the results of its pilot project to monitor high aviation risks, and outline the next steps for monitoring these risks; (b) monitor and report on the status of aviation safety recommendations; and (c) integrate high aviation safety risks into the enterprise risk management process at Secretariat and entity levels, as they are identified.	Important	7(a) – Yes	Chief, Aviation Safety Section	31 March 2027	DOS is in the process of documenting the results of the pilot project with the aim of establishing proactive risk mitigation measures.
			7(b) – No	N/A	N/A	This recommendation closely resembles part (b) of the recommendation immediately below. DOS requests that the recommendation be deleted.
			7 (c) – Yes	Chief, Aviation Safety Section	31 March 2027	DOS will assess aviation safety risks for potential inclusion in the DOS risk register, as appropriate.
87	DOS should establish update : (a) criteria for nominating staff to conduct aviation accident investigations to enhance objectivity of the investigations; and (b) procedures to follow up on timely completion of accident investigations and monitor the implementation of investigation recommendations.	Important	Yes, if revised, as requested	Chief, Aviation Safety Section	30 June 2027	The comments of DOS are reflected in the report. The Department reiterates that the criteria for nominations, the timeline, the report preparation, and the subsequent follow-up procedures are outlined in the current AvSS Manual (D.6.3. Investigations). Nevertheless, the new DOS Aviation Manual will feature updated criteria and procedures for Aviation Safety Technical Investigations.

Management Response

Audit of aviation safety oversight and management at the United Nations Headquarters

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ₂	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
98	DOS should adopt a risk-based approach to conduct aviation safety assessment visits to ensure adequate safety management.	Important	Yes	Chief, Aviation Safety Section	30 September 2027	The comments of DOS are reflected in the report. The implementation of the recommendation is, however, contingent upon the availability of resources.
109	DOS should: (a) enhance the utilization of the iAviationSafety database by raising awareness of its functionalities and benefits to improve aviation operations; and (b) in coordination with field missions, establish a process to regularly review and update user access rights to protect the confidentiality of aviation safety data.	Important	Yes	Chief, Aviation Safety Section	30 June 2027	DOS will issue a facsimile to missions to encourage the use of the iAviationSafety platform. The Department will also take measures to ensure that user access rights are appropriately managed through regular updates to the platform.