



WFP Afghanistan

SPECIAL OPERATION SO 200870

Country:	Afghanistan
Type of project:	Special Operation
Title:	Provision of Humanitarian Air Services in Afghanistan
Total cost (US\$):	US\$16,447,642
Duration:	(Twelve months) 01 January - 31 December 2016

Executive Summary

The Special Operation (SO) has been prepared to ensure the continued provision of safe and reliable air transport services to the humanitarian community in Afghanistan for a one-year period from January to December 2016.

Afghanistan has been in protracted conflict for almost thirty-five years, which has seriously hampered poverty reduction and development, strained the fabric of society and depleted the country's coping mechanisms. Afghanistan is prone to recurrent natural disasters. Given the underlying fragility – at the economic, political and security levels – the country is not able to adequately cope with the consequences of such disasters, and depends on external support provided through the humanitarian community. The considerable scale-up of international aid efforts in 2002 precipitated the need for a robust humanitarian air service in the country. Since then, air services have been implemented through successive operations whilst activities have been adapted to the evolving needs.

Meanwhile, fighting in 2015 has turned out to be the bloodiest on record since 2001. Insecurity significantly increased throughout the country, civilian deaths shot up and the situation led to large-scale displacement forcing many Afghans to flee in search of refuge. Due to the fluid security situation, air access is a necessity and the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) has assumed a critical role as part of the larger aid response architecture. In 2015, air services under SO 200639 have assisted 160 humanitarian organizations with access to key locations thereby supporting life-saving relief programmes.

The Special Operation is required for one year, from 1 January to 31 December 2016, at a total cost of **US\$16,447,642**. UNHAS plans to continue to cover 75 percent from donor contributions with the remaining 25 percent of the funding requirements generated from cost-recovery through nominal fees. Full cost-recovery will be applied to dedicated flights.

The project activities will constantly be reviewed and required changes processed through budget revisions.

Project Background

1. Over 30 years of conflict have left Afghanistan one of the poorest countries in the world. More than a third of Afghans live below the poverty line, 1 in 10 children die before their fifth birthday and average life expectancy is just 49¹. Although the country is making progress, considerable challenges still lie ahead. Afghanistan is one of the most complex humanitarian emergencies, characterized by recurring conflict, new and protracted displacement, insecurity, crisis levels of malnutrition and food insecurity, chronic poverty, and a deteriorating war economy. Humanitarian needs remain high throughout the country's 34 provinces. Efforts to address the root causes of poverty are limited due to the ongoing conflict resulting in poor sanitation and minimal livelihood opportunities which increase vulnerability and deprivation.
2. Widespread natural disasters occur every year, affecting on average a quarter of a million people. In May 2015, a landslide hit the village of Jerow Bala in Bhadakhshan province, killing people and destroying property². On 26 October 2015, a 7.5 magnitude earthquake struck northeastern Afghanistan, sending shockwaves that were felt as far away as India³. Due to tremors, the earthquake resulted in substantial damage to buildings and infrastructure in Afghanistan and neighbouring Pakistan, as well as scores of deaths and hundreds of injuries. With a baseline of perpetuating chronic need, the country is also highly susceptible to spikes in malnutrition and disease that regularly breach global thresholds requiring urgent humanitarian response. In 2015, some 7.4 million were reported in need of humanitarian assistance with needs ranging from food, healthcare, and protection⁴.
3. The security environment is highly volatile and has deteriorated since the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission and most international forces. The inability of the Afghan Government to take on additional security obligations has further complicated the humanitarian situation, resulting in an upsurge in security incidents. Increasing insecurity has also led to a rise in internal displacement. As of July, 139,000 people were reported displaced by conflict in 2015, with a surge in Kunduz and Helmand⁵. By the end of 2015, an additional 324,000 are estimated to become displaced because of conflict⁶. Access to adequate shelter, water, food, and employment opportunities is very limited for people displaced in remote and inaccessible areas of the country. Meanwhile, the number of people fleeing the country continues to increase.

Project Justification

4. The need for continued air services remains high. Regular and sustained access is a challenge for aid organizations operating in Afghanistan. The transportation situation within the country is fraught with difficulties. Road infrastructure in most areas of

¹ ACAPS, Global Emergency Overview, Snapshot 28 October – 2 November, 2015.

² OCHA Monthly Humanitarian Bulletin, 30 May 2015.

³ OCHA Monthly Humanitarian Bulletin, 30 October 2015.

⁴ ACAPS, Global Emergency Overview, Snapshot 28 October – 2 November, 2015.

⁵ OCHA Monthly Humanitarian Bulletin, 31 July 2015.

⁶ ACAPS, Global Emergency Overview, Snapshot 28 October – 2 November, 2015.

Afghanistan is poor or non-existent, and banditry is common on the few functioning highways. Increased insurgency and criminal attacks have meanwhile, restricted missions by road for most aid workers. For humanitarian workers, air travel is often the only option to reach affected populations in remote and insecure areas within Afghanistan. The country's economic situation has affected development of the aviation industry and domestic air carriers serving the larger population centres have been severely compromised and do not meet international aviation safety standards.

5. UNHAS remains the only service that provides an extensive air network to the entire humanitarian community in Afghanistan. The UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) offer some humanitarian air services in the country and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has an air service for its own staff. PACTEC, which used to provide air services for aid organizations in the country discontinued the service during the course of 2015. UNHAS is therefore the only air service for the larger humanitarian community in Afghanistan offering domestic flights that are approved by the UN Safety and Security Department and are considered compliant with international aviation safety standards. This has meant more aid workers are now using UNHAS, increasing the passenger demand by far more than 8,000 passengers per year. UNHAS supports the implementation and monitoring of humanitarian actions and the service is widely used by NGOs, foreign diplomats and UN employees to travel around the country, as well as to Islamabad in neighbouring Pakistan when required. As of October 2015, UNHAS had transported 21,102 passengers and moved 65.94 mt of light cargo flying to more than 25 destinations including remote and high-altitude sites. Following further deterioration in the security situation, the service conducted 159 medical and security evacuation. The operation is receiving several new applications for registration. Between September and October 2015, UNHAS registered an additional 30 organizations as users.
6. Access constraints due to inhospitable terrain continues to hamper the humanitarian response in Afghanistan. Remote and mountainous areas can neither be accessed by road nor by fixed-wing aircraft. Furthermore, extreme weather conditions characterise the country's seasons. Most of Afghanistan has a sub-arctic mountain climate with dry and very cold winters, except for the lowlands, which have arid and semi-arid climates. The country has clearly defined seasons, summers are very hot and winters can be bitterly cold. Most of the precipitation falls between the months of October and April. The mountainous parts of the country receive in excess of 1000 mm of precipitation, mostly as snow. Frontal winds often bring large sandstorms or dust storms, while the strong solar heating of the ground raises large local whirlwinds. All these factors require a robust aviation structure such as the one provided through UNHAS to ensure reliable access for humanitarians into all affected areas.
7. As insecurity worsens, preparedness to respond adequately to emergencies without delay is crucial. Afghanistan continues to be a dangerous place for humanitarians to work and access to priority humanitarian caseloads continues to be a significant challenge. In October 2015, there were 19 incidents reported against non-governmental organizations across Afghanistan. These incidents resulted in violence against aid workers, damage to assets or facilities, and disruption of humanitarian activities. There were 18 reported killings, 33 injuries and 12 abductions⁷. In September 2015, UNHAS conducted one of its biggest evacuations in the country. The service relocated 240 staff members out of Jawan, Kunduz and Maimana following a grave deterioration in the security situation. UNHAS is the only option available for the whole humanitarian community for providing not only regular flights but emergency flights for medical and security evacuations.

Project Objectives

⁷ Aid Workers Security Database, 31 October 2015.

8. Objectives of the Special Operation are:
- To provide NGOs, UN agencies, donor organizations and diplomatic missions operating in Afghanistan with safe, effective and efficient access to beneficiaries and project implementation sites;
 - To transport light cargo such as medical supplies, specialized food commodities and high value equipment (ICT); and
 - To provide adequate capacity for evacuations of humanitarian staff.

The objectives above are linked to WFP's Strategic Results Framework and are examples of Strategic Objective 1: Save lives and protect livelihoods in emergencies.

Project Implementation

9. As of October 2015, UNHAS was serving 25 locations regularly in Afghanistan and various destinations on an ad hoc basis using four varied performance aircraft strategically based Kabul. In 2016, UNHAS will operate a fleet of four aircraft: three fixed-wing aircraft and one helicopter all certified for 19 seats. The fleet will serve 25 locations and use Islamabad in Pakistan as an emergency evacuation route.
10. WFP will continue to organise UNHAS User Group Committee (UGC) meetings composed of NGOs, UN agencies, and donor representatives in Kabul. The UGC is composed of NGOs, UN agencies, and donor representatives and its role is administrative. It provides feedback to the Chief Air Transport Officer (CATO) to help ensure service meeting the needs of the humanitarian community. The Board of Directors is a high level body of which endorses administrative issues arising from the UGC, proposed strategies and supports resource mobilization efforts for the operation.
11. The project will follow standard UNHAS management structure and support systems:
- Passenger and cargo bookings will be made through set systems to ensure the dissemination of flight schedules and manifests to all locations.
 - A dedicated communication system to monitor the progress of all flights through VHF/HF radios and the Satellite tracking systems.
 - An electronic Flight Management Application (E-FMA) that enables on-line booking requests by various agencies and monitoring of load factors, operational trends and costs.
 - The Performance Management Tool (PMT) that allows decision makers to automatically collect and process data enabling them to carry out an analysis of variations and trends necessary to make an informed decision and optimize the operation.
 - Demand-driven flight schedules that allow flexibility to accommodate special flights such as medical and security relocations.
12. Efforts will be made to contain costs and ensure value-for-money throughout the project cycle.

Project Management

13. The WFP Afghanistan Country Director (CD) will be the Funds Manager. The UNHAS Afghanistan Finance Officer will be the Allotment Administrator of this operation.
14. The overall management, administration, and control of the operation are vested in the Chief Air Transport Officer, who reports directly to the Country Director and

functionally to the Director of Supply Chain Division through the Chief of Aviation Service in Headquarters, Rome. The CATO will be responsible for all operational matters including scheduling, operators' compliance, safety management, and risk management. The CATO will provide operational reports to the CD, the Chief of Aviation Service and the UGC.

15. The Aviation Service (OSLA) in Rome will be responsible for contracting of aircraft, quality assurance and normative guidance to the operation. OSLA will also provide other operational and administrative support.

Project Cost & Benefits

16. The total project cost for this Special Operation is **US\$16,447,642** as detailed in the budget below:

PROJECT COST BREAKDOWN		
Special Operation	Provision of Humanitarian Air Services in Afghanistan	Value (US\$)
Project Number	200870	
Capacity Development and Augmentation (CD&A):		
A – WFP Staff Related Costs (Staff directly involved in Operations)		1,260,668
B - Implementation Inputs (Operational Agreements, Communication, Vehicle leasing and maintenance)		12,319,826
Total Capacity Development and Augmentation (CD&A):		13,580,494
Direct Support Costs (DSC):		
A - WFP Staff Related Costs (Staff involved in Management and Administration)		1,117,243
B – Recurring expenses and Other WFP Costs		296,179
C – Capital Equipment Costs		45,603
D – Local Security Costs		165,906
E – Travel and Transportation Costs		166,203
Total WFP Direct Costs:		1,791,134
Indirect Support Costs (ISC - 7 percent) :		1,076,014
TOTAL WFP COSTS		16,447,642

17. UNHAS plans to continue to cover 75 percent from donor contributions with the remaining 25 percent of the funding requirements generated from cost-recovery through nominal fees. Full cost-recovery will be applied to dedicated flights.

18. The benefits envisaged under the UNHAS operation in Afghanistan are as follows:

- Provision of predictable access to priority destinations in order to enable humanitarian staff and donor entities to implement and monitor their projects;
- Operational efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation and monitoring of humanitarian operations;
- A common service consistent with the call by the United Nations Secretary-General “for greater unity of purpose and coherence at country level and that each United Nations entity should benefit from another’s presence through establishing corresponding consultative and collaborative arrangements”;

- Enhanced air safety through a standardized, single contracting and safety surveillance system;
- A client-oriented common service that responds to users' needs;
- A cost-effective service that can take advantage of economies-of-scale through continuous monitoring and a results-based management concept; and
- An essential mechanism to provide medical and security evacuation services to the humanitarian community in Afghanistan.

19. Efforts will be made to contain costs and ensure value-for-money throughout the project cycle.

Monitoring and Evaluation

20. The project's key performance indicators will include the following:

- Number of Needs Assessments carried out (target: 4);
- Number of passengers transported (target: 30,000);
- Amount of light cargo transported (target: 84,000 kg);
- Percentage of passenger bookings served (target: 95%);
- Response to medical and security evacuation duly requested (target: 100%);
- Number of organizations using the service (target: 160);
- Locations served (target: 25).

21. As the situation evolves, the implementation plan will be revised, according to the needs of the humanitarian community.

Risk Assessment and Contingency Planning

22. A number of risks could impact the implementation of the Special Operation. The main risks identified are presented through the three risk areas (contextual, programmatic and institutional). The subsequent narrative explains the risks and outlines mitigation measures to be taken.

23. **Contextual Risks.** Security in Afghanistan can further deteriorate, which may result in restricted humanitarian travel. UNHAS will work in close coordination with UNDSS to ensure timely communication of the security situation at destinations and will plan its operations accordingly. Identification of operational hazards will be done through established WFP Aviation procedures, the relevant risk analyzed and mitigation actions taken in order to keep an acceptable risk level.

24. **Programmatic Risks.** Humanitarian organizations may scale up their assistance in the country through an increase of staff and expansion of activities to more remote areas. UNHAS will be able to meet the increase in humanitarian travel through efficient planning of flight operations using its current fleet. Additional aircraft capacity can be rapidly deployed for passenger and cargo transport, if required.

25. **Institutional Risks.** The success of the SO is conditional on adequate resources being available to WFP throughout the implementation period. Resource mobilization strategies will include steps to be taken to address any funding shortfall. Fundraising activities will be conducted by UNHAS, the WFP Country Office in Afghanistan, the Regional Bureau and Headquarters in order to ensure uninterrupted services for the humanitarian community.

Exit Strategy

26. Given the complex situation in Afghanistan, WFP cannot envisage at this point the development of an exit strategy. WFP will rely on the UGC's regular feedback and will devise an exit strategy accordingly. However, given the contractual arrangements, a scale down of UNHAS activities can easily be done if and when viable commercial aviation alternatives become available.

RECOMMENDATION

This Special Operation covering the period from 01 January to 31 December 2016 at a total cost to WFP of **US\$16,447,642** is recommended for approval by the Executive Director, with the budget provided.

APPROVAL

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Ertharin Cousin
Executive Director

Annex A
UNHAS Afghanistan routes (as of November 2015)

AFGHANISTAN: DESTINATIONS SERVED BY UNITED NATIONS HUMANITARIAN AIR SERVICE (UNHAS) - 2015

