**Air Safety Guide**

Staff are required to fly extensively between countries and internally. While air travel is generally regarded as the safest means of transport, in some countries the risk is increased due to weather conditions and terrain, limited infrastructure and poor safety standards. XXXX will always endeavour to choose reputable airlines and routes that present the lowest risk. However, in some countries and regions the choice of these will be limited.

XXXX does not have the capacity or the technical skills to assess airline safety and therefore relies on external sources to assist decision making in this regard. XXXX offices should combine the identified sources with local knowledge and contacts to reinforce their decisions.

The aim of these guidelines is to support all XXXX offices to select reliable airlines for official travel. Each XXXX office should maintain a country list of approved airlines available to staff and visitors and this list must be updated regularly (at least annually or following any major development).

Each XXXX office shall categorise air carriers as follows:

* **Category A:** No travel restrictions.
* **Category B:** If operationally essential and a Category A carrier unavailable within a reasonable amount of time, requires Country Directors written approval. Where the only option for regular travel routes within a country is a Category B airline (i.e. no Category A airline operates on the require routes) then standing approval can be issued by the Country Representative i.e. documented in the Travel SOP within the CO Security Plan.
* **Category C:** Emergency travel only, requires Country Directors written approval.
* **Category D:** Prohibited for travel.

Staff may be confronted by a situation where they have to take a flight on an unapproved aircraft or airline at very short notice and it is impossible to gain approval quickly enough. In such cases staff are required to use their best judgement and to consider the balance between the level of safety risk and the urgency of the flight. All such cases must be reported to the Country Director as soon as possible after the event.

**Basic precautions**

To minimise the risks associated with staff should follow these basic precautions:

* Avoid airlines with a known poor safety record. Always consult the Country Office/Field Office which should have details on which airlines staff can use, and any prior approval required. If you have concerns about the safety of the proposed flight, seek advice from the Office you are travelling to or the Security Focal Point.
* Try to avoid routes with multiple stopovers. Most accidents occur during take-off and landing, so the fewer stops you make, the less risk you face.
* Be aware of local weather conditions in both your departure and destination locations. Consider delaying your journey if bad weather is forecast.
* Don’t board a flight if you have serious concerns about its safety or security, for example if the aircraft is in poor condition, it is overloaded with baggage or other items in the aisle, there are too many passengers for the number of seats, or there is poor security screening in place before boarding. If time permits, consult with your line manager or the SFP. Trust your instincts.
* Request an aisle seat near the emergency exits when checking in. The over-wing exits have less drop distance to the ground than those away from the wings.
* Check that your seat has a working safety belt and lifejacket when you board. Move seat if necessary.
* Pay attention to the pre-flight safety briefing and study the flight safety card if provided. Be aware of the location of exit doors and hatches and how to operate them.
* Report incidents or safety concerns you encounter during your flight to your line manager, or the SFP. Reporting such incidents will help reduce risks to colleagues in the future.

**Using helicopters**

Aid agencies often use helicopters in major relief operations to transport staff and supplies to inaccessible areas. However, travelling by helicopter poses an additional safety hazard and you must adhere to the following:

* Never approach or leave a helicopter until you receive the visual signal from the pilot, or instructed to by ground staff.
* Stay where the pilot can always see you and never approach or leave from the rear of the helicopter.
* ***Safety Zones***

* Don't approach or leave a helicopter when the engine and rotors are starting up or shutting down, even if you duck your head, the blades can flex down when turning slowly or when it's windy.
* Never approach a helicopter by walking down a slope or leave by walking up a slope.
* Take extra care when loading or unloading equipment. Carry long items horizontally below waist height, never upright or on your shoulder.
* Helicopter rotors will blow about dust, dirt and loose articles, especially when hovering. Make sure items are secure and if an item does get blown away, don't chase it.
* Once on board, fasten your seat belt and pay close attention to the pre-flight safety briefing and any instructions during the flight. Make sure you know how to exit safely in an emergency.