

## **CANSO Person of the Year 2026**

**Nominee: Don Thoma, CEO, Aireon**

Description of why they should be nominated

- As the chief executive at Aireon, Don Thoma has been instrumental in bringing about revolutionary advancements in air traffic safety and surveillance.
- He didn't just launch a company; he expanded the horizon of global aviation.
- Since its introduction to the market, Aireon's space-based automatic dependent surveillance-broadcast (ADS-B) technology has helped dozens of air navigation service providers (ANSP) to drive significant operational and safety benefits. This massive shift would not have been possible without Don's leadership and vision.
- Don joined Aireon as an original founder and the first and only CEO. Since that time, the Aireon team has become a critical part of the world's aviation infrastructure, innovating to achieve an impressive list of aviation industry firsts including: the first global, air traffic surveillance system; the first satellite hosted-payloads business; the first "surveillance as a service" business model; and the first commercial company to obtain safety certification by EASA.
- Since going operational in 2019, Don has led Aireon from a bold startup to a global enterprise serving over 24 Air Navigation Service Providers.
- Under his leadership, Aireon has moved beyond surveillance into critical commercial data services — tackling everything from real-time turbulence detection to GNSS interference monitoring.
- As the company grew externally, Don was also carefully attracting and cultivating the Aireon team of engineers, data scientists and aviation industry experts to guide the company through its robust growth and boundless innovation.
- Aireon started as an idea; and now it is an international industry powerhouse 150+ employees strong.
- Technologically speaking, Don and the rest of the Aireon team have changed the game for air traffic surveillance. Before Aireon, more than 70 percent of the globe was operating aircraft without any radar coverage. Now, Aireon customers, which represent nearly 50 countries around the world, are able to see, in real-time with unprecedented reliability and consistency, the air traffic in their regions. The value of these capabilities cannot be overstated, and in particular, the Aireon data has elevated safety in underserved, remote areas of the world where there is no ground-based coverage.

- This rapid industry growth and positive impact was all made possible by Don's passion for improving safety for the global aviation community.
- In addition to his tireless work at Aireon, Don has been an active participant in shaping the future of the aviation industry for years, serving in leadership capacities at CANSO, ATCA, and the Aerospace Industries Association Board of Governors.