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Chairman: Mr. Sharma (Nepal)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 118: Human resources management
(continued)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the implementation of all provisions of General Assembly resolution 55/258 on human resources management by the Department of Management (continued) (A/57/726)

1. **Mr. Niiya** (Japan) welcomed the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the implementation of all provisions of General Assembly resolution 55/258 on human resources management (A/57/726). Although it was premature to assess its full impact, the report was likely to contribute to further progress in that area. Unfortunately, the report did not reveal whether the introduction of human resources action plans had achieved the desired results and lacked details of the specific targets for achieving equitable geographical representation.

2. With regard to the staff selection system, OIOS should prepare a report on whether the introduction of the new system had served to speed up the recruitment process. While a managed reassignment programme for young professionals would enhance the career development prospects of qualified staff members and foster mobility, the Office of Human Resources Management should continue its efforts to promote mobility so that its policy in that area could be fully implemented by 2007. His delegation welcomed the streamlined rules and procedures for human resources management. Administrative instructions should be issued, however, in order to clarify the status of the delegation of authority.

Agenda item 122: Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (continued)

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the management review of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (continued) (A/57/488)

3. **Mr. Vassilakis** (Greece), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries

Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said that the European Union had always attached great importance to the smooth functioning of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and to providing it with adequate resources to carry out its mission, which constituted a priority activity of the United Nations. He shared the view expressed in paragraph 3 of the report of OIOS on the management review of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (A/57/488) that the priority status accorded to the human rights programme in the medium-term plans was not reflected in the United Nations regular budget resource base. The European Union was therefore prepared to consider increased regular funding for treaty bodies and special procedures, taking into account the recommendations of OIOS, and bearing in mind that some elements were the subject of ongoing reform efforts by the Secretary-General.

4. **Mr. Hønningstad** (Norway) observed that the promotion and protection of human rights was crucial to the achievement of the aims of the United Nations and should be further mainstreamed into all United Nations activities and the necessary resources allocated to the human rights machinery. The OIOS report represented a serious and honest effort to improve the efficiency of OHCHR and many of its recommendations were already being implemented. Member States must take the opportunity to contribute to the process of change, in particular through their willingness to increase the resource base of the Office. In that connection, he welcomed the willingness of the European Union to consider increased regular funding for OHCHR. For its part, Norway would support the High Commissioner in his efforts to formulate a comprehensive strategy and clear priorities with a view to assessing and enhancing the field presence of the Office and to improving its organizational management and structures. It would also continue to contribute funds to OHCHR and had already earmarked approximately US\$ 4 million for that purpose in 2003.

5. Although the mandate and responsibilities of OHCHR had been steadily expanding, its resource allocation had not followed suit. The Office's share of the regular budget had dwindled to only 1.54 per cent, only 88 of its 155 core Professional posts were financed from that budget, and 67 per cent of its overall budget now came from voluntary contributions.

The OIOS report confirmed the growing challenge posed by the disparity between resources and workload. Member States had a joint responsibility to reverse the negative trend and should, at the very least, ensure that the core functions of OHCHR were properly funded from the regular budget.

6. **Mr. Niiya** (Japan) said that improving the management of OHCHR was essential if its efficiency and effectiveness were to be further enhanced. In that connection, the report's recommendations on organization and structure, executive management, information management, administrative and financial management and human resources management were critically important.

7. On the issue of human resources management, Japan shared the concerns expressed by OIOS about the widespread assignment of technical advisers to carry out line functions and endorsed the recommendation contained in paragraph 49 of the report. Japan was also concerned about the serious geographical imbalance in the composition of the Office's secretariat. Further efforts must be made to ensure that the principle of equitable distribution was respected by all heads of department and programme managers.

8. **Mr. Mazumdar** (India) said that the report had brought out both the problems faced by OHCHR and their underlying causes. Of immediate concern was the rapid increase in extrabudgetary funding in relation to regular budgetary resources in the financing of OHCHR operational activities. Of even greater concern was the fact that the mandated core activities of the Office were now largely supported by voluntary contributions.

9. His delegation concurred with the observation of OIOS that, over the years, OHCHR had acquired in an ad hoc and uncoordinated manner additional responsibilities and mandates that matched neither its financial resources nor its available expertise. The General Assembly should be kept fully apprised of the resource implications arising from additional mandates before approving the mandates. The unplanned growth of mandates and activities had resulted in duplication of effort, inefficiencies and inadequate follow-up. Indeed, the Office was finding it increasingly difficult to complete in a timely manner such primary functions as the examination of country reports of Member States, of which there was a huge backlog. Another

resulting development had been the creation of a cumbersome and unwieldy bureaucracy. Along with the rationalization of the work of OHCHR, it would therefore be necessary also to address the issue of staff strength with a view to bringing it into line with whatever level of budgetary resources the Office could sustain.

10. Another aspect of the current situation was that 47 per cent of all core staff were financed from extrabudgetary resources. Use of project staff in such large numbers had made personnel management complicated and controversial. In particular, the widespread assignment of line functions to such staff was most undesirable.

11. The report also concluded that the situation had adversely affected the geographical distribution of OHCHR staff and consultants and that the bias in favour of representation from Western Europe and North America was due to the direct correlation between voluntary contributions and staffing distribution.

12. The enhanced use of information technology in the management system and the strengthening of administrative and financial management in OHCHR were other important recommendations of OIOS that should be considered as a matter of priority. Indeed, it was important that the current recommendations should not meet the same fate as that of the more than 100 earlier recommendations that had resulted from similar exercises in improving the management of OHCHR.

13. **Mr. Nair** (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services) said that he was reassured that Member States had found the OIOS report valuable. The report on the management review of OHCHR had been well received and a number of its recommendations were already being implemented by the Office. It would be most appropriate for the High Commissioner himself to report on progress in that area in the context of his follow-up to the Secretary-General's report on the strengthening of the United Nations. OIOS would also be following up on its recommendations.

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services on the investigation into sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers in West Africa (continued) (A/57/465)

14. **Mr. Zevelakis** (Greece), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Cyprus,

the Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said that it would be more appropriate for the composition of teams investigating the sexual exploitation of refugees to be gender-balanced. He also felt that the cases of sexual exploitation in the report could have been presented in a more delicate fashion. Sexual exploitation, particularly of vulnerable persons who were dependent on international aid, was completely unacceptable. In order to ensure that perpetrators were held accountable, the agency that employed them should terminate their contracts and, where there was sufficient evidence, legal action should be taken. In that connection, the European Union fully supported the Plan of Action that had been developed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force and recently adopted by the humanitarian community.

15. **Mr. Hønningstad** (Norway) said that, when dealing with the sexual exploitation of vulnerable individuals by trusted members of the international community, a credible zero tolerance policy must be adopted. The United Nations must not be perceived as trying to downplay or conceal the fact that humanitarian workers were sometimes involved in the sexual abuse of women and children.

16. Preventing such abuses posed a managerial challenge. United Nations organizations and their partners must have established structures designed to prevent exploitation and must take responsibility for bringing to justice individuals found guilty of such crimes. In the event that local circumstances were difficult, particular responsibility lay with international actors, and, in accordance with Security Council resolution 1400 (2002), it might eventually be necessary for international personnel to be prosecuted by their home countries. Victims must also be given adequate support.

17. He welcomed the recommendations contained in the OIOS report. Despite its inherent shortcomings, the report emphasized the responsibility of the United Nations to prevent such totally unacceptable practices. He was satisfied with the preventive efforts undertaken by the IASC Task Force, whose important work to increase accountability should continue.

18. **Mr. Niiya** (Japan) said that he strongly condemned any form of sexual exploitation of refugees

by humanitarian aid workers and peacekeepers in refugee camps. In the light of the recommendations contained in the report, all of the organizations concerned, including the IASC Task Force, OHCHR and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, should continue to take preventive measures and OIOS should continue to monitor the implementation of its recommendations and to report to the General Assembly on any developments.

19. **Mr. Kramer** (Canada), speaking on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand (CANZ), welcomed Mr. Nair's responses to the questions that had been raised earlier by the CANZ delegations. He wished to know how OIOS coped with unforeseen and urgent investigations and whether the funds for such investigations came from regular budget resources or from elsewhere.

20. **Mr. Nair** (Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services), responding to concerns about the apparent discrepancies between the findings of the OIOS Investigation Team and those of the consultants, said that the work carried out by the consultants had not been an investigation as such, but rather a collection of allegations gleaned from hearsay and group interviews. Of the 12 cases of alleged sexual exploitation identified by the consultants, not one had been substantiated by the OIOS investigators, whereas the OIOS Investigation Team had been able to identify and fully investigate 43 cases of possible sexual exploitation, of which 10 had been substantiated by the evidence.

21. On the question of whether the standards set by the OIOS Investigation Team were too high, the Team needed enough firm evidence of exploitation to corroborate the allegations and take disciplinary action against the perpetrators. As for the scope of the investigation, there were practical problems associated with broadening it to include internally displaced persons and other vulnerable groups. Unfortunately, OIOS did not have sufficient human or financial resources to look at any cases other than the most egregious ones.

22. As to whether the recommendations contained in the report had been followed up by the agencies and offices concerned, it was sometimes difficult to ascertain whether the recommended measures had been implemented on the ground and whether they had become standard for camps in places other than West

Africa. Many of them were still awaiting follow-up, however, and, in accordance with recommendation 2, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee should report to the General Assembly on the measures that had been put in place.

23. On the question of funds for unforeseen and urgent investigations, the Office simply did not have the money to cope with urgent investigations and was forced to find the necessary funds wherever it could. When the need for an urgent investigation arose, all of the staff of the OIOS Investigations Division worked on assignments. The request for an investigation had come from the Secretary-General and OHCHR and the credibility of the Organization was at stake. Staff had therefore been redeployed to make up a core of investigators. OIOS had also recruited translators and specialists in paediatrics and human rights to assist in the investigation. Extra funding, especially funding to pay for travel, had been found from sources, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and some of that expenditure had still not been met. Inevitably, existing staff and resources had been redeployed at the expense of other areas of work and OIOS had been forced to determine priorities by focusing on high-risk matters, such as the investigation into possible sexual exploitation of refugees by aid workers.

Agenda item 111: Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations (*continued*)

Agenda item 118: Human resources management (*continued*)

Gratis personnel provided by Governments and other entities (continued) (A/57/721 and A/57/735)

24. **Mr. Eljy** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that, with more time, it might have been possible to review the wider context of the financial situation of the Organization when discussing the use of gratis personnel. The root cause of recourse to that category of staff was the failure of Member States to pay their assessments. Member States providing gratis personnel should be in a position to fulfil their financial obligations. The employment of gratis personnel, whose numbers were rising, should be subject to restrictions and conditions, as such staff were not

bound by the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations and were not accountable to the Secretary-General.

25. Annual reports to the General Assembly failed to state the exact number of gratis personnel and it would be helpful to know whether the figures provided complied with the requirements of General Assembly resolution 51/243. While contributions from Member States to help the Organization fulfil its responsibilities were welcome in cash or in kind, gratis personnel should be employed temporarily and only where they supplied expertise that the Organization's own staff did not have. Employment of gratis personnel had exceeded those boundaries and not only threatened the independence and international character of the Organization but also complicated financing and personnel matters. Member States should focus instead on making trust fund or regular budget contributions to enable the Organization to recruit experts in any field, while adhering to the principles of equitable geographical distribution, independence and transparency in the award of contracts.

26. His delegation was concerned at the recommendation of ACABQ that the Secretary-General should be asked to provide information on the employment of gratis personnel in the context of his biennial report on the composition of the Secretariat. The inclusion of such information in the report would conflict with the exceptional nature of the employment of gratis personnel. The General Assembly, moreover, was not in a position to monitor gratis personnel and quarterly reports should therefore be provided on the number of such personnel and on their nationality, duration of service and functions.

Agenda item 117: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (*continued*)

Measures to encourage Member States in arrears to reduce and eventually pay their arrears (continued) (A/57/76)

27. **Mr. Vassilakis** (Greece), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said that, given the General Assembly's decision not to change the elements of the

scale methodology for the upcoming period, those elements were not for discussion at the Assembly's fifty-eighth session. In the absence of the reformed scales, which would have contributed to the financial health of the Organization, Member States should ensure compliance with the provisions of Article 19 of the Charter of the United Nations and consider adopting provisions to ensure the full, timely and unconditional payment of assessed contributions. The Committee should also consider both the net-to-net formula for calculating payments and arrears and the biannual calculation of arrears. He also recalled the General Assembly's request at its fifty-sixth session that Member States in arrears should provide a payment schedule or an explanation of their payment intentions.

28. The European Union continued to believe that the possibility of introducing incentives should be examined. It also took note of the proposal to allocate budgetary surpluses to Member States on an account-by-account basis and to credit their respective shares to those Member States with no outstanding assessments. The Union supported the recommendations of the Committee on Contributions concerning interest on arrears and multi-year payment plans.

29. **Mr. Yamanaka** (Japan) said that any measures introduced to encourage Member States to pay their arrears should facilitate such payments. There were differences between the fiscal year cycle of Member States, including Japan, and that of the United Nations and the technical problems caused by those differences should not be ignored. Despite its difficult fiscal situation, Japan was making every effort to pay its contributions to the budget of the Organization.

30. His delegation doubted the value of introducing punitive measures, such as indexing or charging interest on unpaid assessed contributions, which could hinder the efforts of Member States to make payments and jeopardize the goal of encouraging them to clear their arrears.

31. **Mr. Wins** (Uruguay) said that his delegation shared the views expressed by the Group of 77 and China and the Rio Group. All available options had not been thoroughly analysed and the proposed measures focused more on punishment than on encouragement, which was the wrong way to approach the problem.

32. Although the scale of assessments had been frozen, the calculation of assessments did not take

account of ability to pay. The problem was that economic data from as far back as the 1990s was still being used to calculate payments. Even though developing countries had experienced some economic growth in the 1990s, their assessments did not reflect their current economic situation. The Secretariat should therefore use more recent economic data, including data for 2002, to calculate assessments.

33. **Mr. Gilpin** (Chief of the Contributions Service, Department of Management) said that the scale of assessments to be considered by the Committee on Contributions in June 2003 would include information up to 2001. The Statistics Division could provide a more technical explanation of the constraints on calculating assessments. It collected data from national statistical authorities, not all of which would have data available for 2002. Where such data was available, it would be liable to substantial revision because it would date from only a few months after the end of the year. The Statistics Division had therefore concluded that some time lag was needed in order to have a comprehensive database for use in calculating assessments.

Agenda item 112: Programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003 (*continued*)

Information and communication technology strategy (*continued*) (A/57/620)

34. **Mr. Vassilakis** (Greece), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the acceding countries Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, the associated countries Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey, and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said that a comprehensive information and communication technology (ICT) strategy would empower the United Nations and help it to become more focused. Resubmission of the report of the Secretary-General on information and communication technology strategy (A/57/620) had gone some way towards addressing the Committee's concerns. Ideally, the revised report should have been issued earlier to allow programme managers to take account of the approved strategy when developing their budget proposals for the biennium 2004-2005. The European Union hoped nevertheless that the principles outlined in the report on the need for bids to be justified in terms of their total economic impact, qualitative return indicators or opportunity costs would be fully applied.

35. Strengthening of the Information and Communications Technology Board was urgently needed for the establishment of common standards in order to ensure compatibility between systems and avoid duplication. To that end, the Board should designate clear points of authority and responsibility for all aspects of information technology in the Organization. Some form of external evaluation of the return on investment indicators should also be introduced.

36. While the report demonstrated that information strategy was already a powerful tool for promoting efficiency within the Organization, the General Assembly should keep the report under review, given its ambitious vision of how information and communication technology could unlock the potential of the Organization and enhance efficiency and programme quality while respecting the General Assembly's mandates on multilingualism. Beyond the efforts already under way to improve the management of meetings and documents, technology should be used to match resources to priorities, make working practices more flexible and improve the quality of information supplied by the Organization.

37. The European Union urged the sharing of knowledge and information across the United Nations system and, in that connection, would welcome information on the status of the project for a system-wide search engine, which would greatly benefit Member States and the general public. The information technology strategy should integrate existing infrastructure, particularly that of peacekeeping missions, in order to ensure full interconnectivity, compatibility, flexibility and cost-effectiveness. An information security policy must also be developed as a priority. Successful implementation of the measures proposed would also need large-scale training of staff.

38. **Mr. Kramer** (Canada), speaking on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand (CANZ), said that the report of the Secretary-General represented significant progress in responding to the provisions of General Assembly resolution 56/239. Viewing information and communication technology on an enterprise-wide basis and introducing mechanisms for central leadership and coordination was a relatively new approach in the Organization, which deserved to be acknowledged.

39. In identifying e-management, knowledge-sharing and services to governing bodies as focus areas, the

report provided a useful tool for classifying work on information and communication technology and its emphasis on the need to measure the return on investment using specific criteria was very helpful. The CANZ delegations welcomed the information that had been provided on governance arrangements and the list of ICT projects together with their completion dates and expected results. Future updates should clarify the status of implementation and the progress achieved towards making an inventory of systems, eliminating duplication and developing, publishing and enforcing standards. More information on the priorities of the strategy, the sequencing of activities, and the estimate of benefits would be helpful. Additional information on best practices in other organizations engaged in similar work from the point of view of investment, maintenance and training, would also be welcome. The report suggested that the United Nations spent far less on information and communication technology than other organizations and it would be interesting to know what were the consequences of that disparity. The strategy was intended to provide a multi-year horizon as the background for specific budgetary proposals for the next biennium, but it was difficult to respond to that strategy without a clear sense of the human and financial resources needed for key projects and components.

40. The CANZ delegations understood the ICT strategy to apply to the Secretariat and wondered what plans existed for cooperation with United Nations funds and programmes. The Secretary-General's agenda for reform pointed to greater coordination and integration in the field and information should be provided on plans to harmonize ICT approaches and systems.

41. ICT governance in an organization as complex and decentralized as the United Nations was vital and emphasis should therefore be placed on central leadership for policy, strategic guidance and standard-setting. In the context of the programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005, the Secretary-General should also address the question of how to better project the leadership needed for such a strategy within the Organization. The Information Technology Services Division also fulfilled technical functions unrelated to information and communication technology, but its core mandate was so complex that those technical functions, such as sound engineering and some broadcasting services, would be better placed in units more concerned with the servicing of meetings.

42. **Ms. Arce de Gabay** (Peru), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Committee should analyse the budgetary aspects of the report once ACABQ had submitted its related report. Other aspects of the report, such as those related to focus areas, building blocks and governance, should be considered at the current session of the Assembly. The importance of governance in ICT made it vital to have a central body to promulgate standards, hence the importance of the Information and Communications Technology Board and its various task forces.

43. **Mr. Eljy** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that any use of information technology should be within the budget. Any additional financial implications should be consistent with increases in the general budget.

44. **Mr. Blinder** (Director of the Information Technology Services Division), replying to questions raised, said that the United Nations system-wide search engine was operational on the Intranet. The system was based on the Google search facility and was expected to be fully operational within the Secretariat before the end of 2003. The next step was to set up a pilot project to enable users to search the entire United Nations system from a single entry point.

45. Implementation of the security strategy had been slow due to the need for specific expertise and experience, but the project was now nearing completion. The expert recruited had spent the previous four months formulating the strategy and the next step was to make the standards known and to provide training.

46. On the question of prioritization, the driving force behind initiatives was the return on investment, which was assessed on the basis of total economic impact, opportunity costs and qualitative indicators of return. Scheduling time frames depended on available resources, the completion of earlier initiatives and the relevant methodology. An electronic inventory of United Nations systems worldwide had been established to identify the best systems and replace ineffective ones with a view to reducing their overall number. Certain redundant systems had already been identified.

47. With regard to the status of projects listed in annex 1 of the report, certain initiatives were either under way or completed. The Committee would be kept informed of any changes in the list.

48. The consequences of the low level of ICT expenditure were particularly apparent in the area of operations and as a result of budget cuts in the current biennium. The overall effect was one of heightened vulnerability, even though the system had not suffered any disruptions in its daily operations.

49. On the question of governance and harmonization of ICT initiatives, the Information and Communications Technology Board was the governing body for ICT activities within the Secretariat. While it would be interesting to extend the operation to United Nations funds and programmes, it was important to oversee smooth implementation at Secretariat level in the first instance. ICT initiatives would be included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005.

*Standards of accommodation for air travel
(continued) (A/57/485)*

50. In the absence of speakers, **the Chairman** said that the Committee had thus concluded its general discussion of the item.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.