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TRAINING AND RESEARCH: UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE
FOR TRAINING AND RESEARCH

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on the United Nations Institute
for Training and Research

Comments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the members of the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (A/35/181, annex).

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

A. General observations

1. As part of its assessment of the major research and training activities of the United Nations system, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) has made an important survey of UNITAR's development over the past few years. Through a number of wide-ranging discussions with senior staff of the Institute, some members of its Board of Trustees and various officials of the United Nations Secretariat and the specialized agencies who are familiar with UNITAR's work, the inspectors have drawn up a comprehensive report analysing UNITAR's role as a "focal point for the origin, discussion, interchange and dissemination of ideas on world problems" as they impinge upon the United Nations. In reviewing the organization, financing and various aspects of the training and research activities of UNITAR, the inspectors have made a number of suggestions which they hope will enable the Institute to function even more effectively in the future.

2. It was thus with considerable interest that the report of JIU (A/35/181, annex) was received by the Secretary-General, who considers it to be a lucid and constructive analysis of some of the major problems now confronting the Institute. The report has initiated new lines of thought and has raised a number of serious questions about the Institute's development in the 1980s. It is not surprising, therefore, that many of the substantive recommendations in the report have formed the basis for a fundamental re-examination of the Institute's performance and future course of action.

3. The inspectors have reached a number of specific conclusions, and it is to these that the present comments are particularly addressed. Five areas, in particular, merit special consideration: institutional structure; co-operation with other institutes; UNITAR as an "executing agency"; co-operation with the United Nations University (UNU); and financing of UNITAR.

B. Institutional structure

4. In its report the JIU recommended that UNITAR should consist of two departments related to its two basic programmes: one for training and one for research. Careful thought is being given to the question of internal restructuring, especially in the light of the envisaged establishment of a United Nations institute for disarmament research within the framework of UNITAR as an interim arrangement until the second special session of the General Assembly devoted to disarmament, in 1982 (Assembly resolution 34/83 M). The suggestion to merge the Project on the Future into the Research Department should be viewed with caution as the two divisions were intended to have different orientations. The Research Department focuses on medium-range, United Nations-oriented studies comprising social, political, legal and security issues, while the Project on the Future concentrates on long-term problems of socio-economic and technological transformation.

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5. The JIU recommended phasing out the Geneva Office of UNITAR and suggested that the essential functions should be performed by New York-based staff or by contract personnel. The Executive Director and trustees of UNITAR have indicated that, in view of the substantial training activities carried out by UNITAR in Geneva and of the envisaged establishment in Geneva of a United Nations institute for disarmament research within UNITAR, it would not be advisable to reduce or close down the Geneva Office.

C. Co-operation with other institutes

6. The Secretary-General acknowledges that a major effort must be undertaken to consolidate the Institute's position as an intellectual arm of the United Nations. If the Institute is to become a focal point in the network of training and research organizations within the United Nations system, it must strengthen and expand its co-operative links with similar bodies within and outside the system. Over the past decade close and fruitful links have been established with a variety of regional and global organizations, among them the regional commissions and institutes such as the Economic Development Institute of the World Bank, the International Institute for Labour Studies and the African Institute for Economic Development and Planning (IDEP). In addition, UNITAR has co-operated closely with a number of academic and other research centres outside the United Nations and with foundations in different countries. Most significantly, the annual meetings of directors of training, research and planning institutes affiliated with the United Nations and the specialized agencies have been particularly useful, and it is hoped that this channel can in future offer UNITAR further opportunities to assist in the formulation of closely co-ordinated programmes, including some joint activities among the participating institutes.

7. Attempts have been made in the past to create a network of co-operative links, but a vigorous effort should now be made within a more cohesive framework of consultation and collaboration. The emphasis placed in the report on a "network strategy" would indeed help to harmonize long-term planning and take advantage of scarce human and financial resources. The need for the Institute to make a concerted effort to augment its role as the focal point within the web of United Nations-affiliated regional and global institutions for training and research is recognized, and the meetings of directors of institutes could indeed play a much greater part in achieving this.

D. UNITAR as an "executing agency"

8. One of the JIU recommendations proposed that UNITAR be entrusted with the role of "executing agency" for UNDP-financed projects. The Secretary-General agrees, in principle, that the suggestion that UNITAR become an executing agency for projects within the competence of the Institute should be explored in depth. To date UNDP funds have been mostly channelled to UNITAR through the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development of the Secretariat, but the magnitude of UNITAR work in this regard has been rapidly growing. The time has now come to reconsider the existing arrangements.

E. Co-operation with the United Nations University

9. The JIU report devoted considerable attention to the relationships which have developed between UNITAR and UNU. This is an area which would benefit from clearer guidelines drawn jointly by UNU and UNITAR in consultation with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Director-General of UNESCO. As the new Rector of UNU assumes his functions the time seems appropriate for such a new initiative. This also provides an opportunity to forge new and mutually rewarding relationships between UNU and other organizations in the United Nations system.

10. As the roles of UNITAR and UNU expand in the fields of peace and international development, it becomes essential that clearer lines of responsibility be established to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort. Sufficient scope exists for collaboration in a number of areas, including energy and questions relating to the creation of a new international economic order. The perception of the potentiality for overlap of functions between the two institutions tends to create confusion for outsiders and compounds the difficulties in attracting adequate financial support, particularly in the case of UNITAR which relies entirely on annual voluntary contributions. The report's recommendation that UNITAR and UNU should be linked in a new formal framework raises some practical questions, but the possibility of inviting the Rector of UNU to serve on its Board of Trustees as an ex officio member should be examined anew. It will be recalled that the Executive Director of UNITAR is an ex officio member of the Council of UNU. The participation of UNU in UNITAR meetings might thus provide an additional ingredient in building a closer relationship between the two bodies in the 1980s.

F. Financing of UNITAR

11. Besides reassessing UNITAR's present organizational arrangements and its role within the United Nations system, JIU stressed that UNITAR could be a more effective and efficient institution if the funding problem were solved. The Board of Trustees and the Executive Director have indicated that, unless more satisfactory funding arrangements are devised soon, the development of new and more sophisticated programmes in the future and the recruitment of professional staff of the highest calibre cannot be assured. Continuing uncertainty about funding hampers long-term planning and reduces the quality of the programmes that can be initiated and developed. The volume of funds for special projects has been increasing over the past few years, but this, as pointed out by JIU, can bring into question the independent character of the Institute. At the same time, the contributions to the Institute's General Fund are insufficient to meet rising central costs of planning and management.

12. In paragraph 62 of its report, the Joint Inspection Unit suggested a number of alternative solutions to this problem, i.e., regular budget support for all of UNITAR expenditures; regular budget support for a basic "core" staff, with "programme" money from voluntary contributions; an endowment, possibly from UNU; and continuation of the current system. The JIU concluded that the most suitable solution would be the second of these alternatives, i.e., regular budget support for a basic "core" budget of about \$1 million per year.

13. As pointed out by JIU, UNITAR was established pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 1827 (XVII) of 18 December 1962 and 1934 (XVIII) of 11 December 1963. In these resolutions, the Assembly defined the general objectives of UNITAR and the mode of operation of the Institute, including the principle that it should be financed by voluntary contributions. Evidently, the recommendation of JIU would do much to place the financing of UNITAR on a firmer basis, allow for long-term planning of quality projects and relieve the Executive Director and his colleagues of the burden of continuous fund raising, which has taken valuable time away from the substantive work of the Institute. But in view of the wording of the enabling resolutions, it is clear that the implementation of that recommendation would require a specific decision to that effect by Member States themselves.

G. Concluding remarks

14. In conclusion, the Secretary-General has welcomed the cogent and critical assessment of UNITAR's performance contained in the report of JIU, which on the whole contains a fair and thorough evaluation of what the Institute has been endeavouring to accomplish over the past few years. In several fundamental respects, the Institute is now at a crossroads in its development and a number of major decisions likely to affect its future will have to be made in the months ahead. UNITAR does indeed have a vital role to play in the intellectual life of the United Nations community. It is therefore essential that the Institute's policies, structure and organization be developed to ensure that its functions can be carried out fully and creatively. The evaluation and recommendations contained in the report of JIU will be of great help in this regard.
