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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Management services in the United Nations system

Note by the Secretary-General

1. The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the members of the General Assembly co-ordinated comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on management services in the United Nations system (A/36/296).
2. In addition to the 11 participating organizations of the Joint Inspection Unit, other organizational entities were asked for their comments in view of the degree of interest in the topic covered. Comments were received from the following:

United Nations

International Labour Office

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

International Civil Aviation Organization

World Health Organization.

3. A summary of the comments received is attached.

ANNEX

Summary of comments

1. The thrust of the recommendations was accepted by all organizational elements which gave comments. In many cases the objectives of the recommendations have already been achieved through current practices, and within the limits which financial and other resources impose. There was therefore general agreement with most of the recommendations, in particular, the carrying out of management improvement functions on a continuing basis (recommendation 1); ongoing review of routines, rules and procedures (recommendation 3); encouragement of participative management (recommendation 7); involvement of management services in forms design and control, and advice on the introduction of new office technology, including systems analysis (recommendations 9 and 10). Comments on specific recommendations are summarized below.

2. On the question of manuals (recommendations 4 and 5) different views were expressed, although the principle of establishing and maintaining them was supported. While, for example, UNESCO has a manual of procedures and policies which is continuously maintained by its Bureau of Personnel, the ILO indicated that it prefers to place emphasis on a system of circulars properly maintained and distributed which it believes is more effective than comprehensive manuals. The United Nations noted the concern of the External Auditors, the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions at the lack of manuals of policy and practice in the areas of finance, personnel and general administration, and that nine of 13 sections of a new Finance Manual have been completed. The United Nations also suggested that JIU might propose a basic outline for a number of areas on a pilot basis, e.g., budget preparation system, purchasing, inventory control, and processing of travel claims. As regards organizational placement of responsibility for the preparation of manuals, the United Nations would not support the actual preparation of manuals on a centralized basis, which in its case would require either a major increase in staffing or neglect of other areas of management service organization. FAO expressed the view that this should vary according to the nature and scope of the manual. In FAO, each unit is responsible for maintaining that part of the manual which relates to its field of responsibility. It concluded that, while this function could equally well be placed elsewhere, in practice the majority of substantive changes concern the personnel area and it seems logical therefore and less repetitive to retain the function of maintaining the manual where it is.

3. The comments also supported recommendation 6 which suggests that the role of management services should include giving of advice on staffing requirements. This appears to be a standard practice of existing management services. UNESCO pointed out, however, that while it is relatively easy to apply work measurement techniques to repetitive tasks, methodologies to be applied to other types of tasks require development particularly having regard to qualitative requirements and differences in output between officials working in their own or in another language. FAO expressed a somewhat similar view. The experience of the United Nations in this

area showed that there was a great reluctance to accept and apply work standards, mainly because they could not be applied across the board to all staff.

4. As regards the quality of reports (recommendation 11), the main comment was that such reports should be strongly action-oriented with less emphasis on historical background.

5. On the question of the establishment of management services (recommendation 12), the consensus of the comments was supportive of the idea of ensuring the involvement of executive heads and staff in the initial discussions and in any subsequent follow-up action.

6. Organizational location (recommendation 13) was not regarded as a problem, so long as the head of the organization demonstrated a keen interest in improved management and the role of the management service in achieving this objective. UNESCO, ICAO and the United Nations stressed the importance of making clear that the management service enjoyed the confidence and full support of top management.

7. There was general agreement that like any other unit each management service should develop a work programme (recommendation 14) and report to legislative or governing bodies through the appropriate channels (recommendation 18). Likewise the proposals that the staff from other units should be drawn upon to help in the carrying out of projects and the involvement of managers and staff in the reviewing process (recommendations 15 and 16) are acceptable.

8. As regards training (recommendation 17), considerable emphasis is placed on using management service personnel to train supervisors and staff in modern management practices with less emphasis on the systematic training of management services staff themselves. This latter function needs equal if not greater attention.

9. Recommendation 19 suggests centralized co-ordination of training, interchange and meetings of management services staff systemwide, as well as increased exchange of information. The comments received indicate that all organizations look forward to co-operating with the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions and the Inspectors in the implementation of this recommendation. Recommendations 20 and 21 appear interrelated in that they both provide for strengthening of management services. Movements into and out of management services are increasing and the subsequent mix of talent will improve the experiential resources of both the services and operational areas.

10. It seems clear from the comments that the report of JIU on management services will prove valuable in three specific ways: (a) as a guide to the different types of management services provided on a systemwide basis; (b) to assist in making management decisions on the direction to be pursued in increasing the effectiveness of management services; and (c) in providing background information to managers in substantive and operational departments and offices on the types of services available.