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TRAINING AND RESEARCH: UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

United Nations University

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 University.

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Report on the United Nations University" (see A/37/111) is the first assessment of the University undertaken by JIU since the University's Charter was approved by the General Assembly in 1973 (resolution 3081 (XXVIII)). The reasons for undertaking the review are spelled out in the introduction to the Inspector's report, namely, to examine the content and practical objectives of the United Nations University (UNU) and to shed some light on "the then apparent lack of success of UNU's efforts in two crucial endeavours: the building of a sound financial basis for the University's programmes and the building of its image, i.e., the establishment vis-à-vis the United Nations system and the world academic communities of a viable, visible and credible international institution" (A/37/111, para. 3).

2. The Secretary-General believes that the report of JIU makes a useful contribution to clarifying ideas about the University at a time when it is aiming to move in new directions.

3. The Secretary-General welcomes the comments on the JIU report made by the UNU Council at its nineteenth session. The Council found the JIU report to be "generally positive in its attitude towards the University and supportive of the new direction and broader intellectual concerns as embodied in its Medium-Term Perspective, 1982-1987". 1/

4. It is noted that the Inspectors have underlined that their report focuses mainly on the structure and method of the University and only in a limited way with the substance of the University's programmes. Moreover, their report is but one of a series of related studies as cited by the Inspectors, that is, among others, the report of the Swedish-Norwegian team on the United Nations University (1979), and the report on fund-raising efforts for the United Nations University (A/34/654, annex). The Secretary-General believes that there is still a need to assess the scholarly achievements of the University and the extent to which the University has succeeded in serving its global constituency in keeping with the provisions of its Charter. Such an assessment would necessarily involve efforts at a variety of levels to obtain a qualitative evaluation of its research and training activities as well as to assess its impact at the global level and, in particular, in the developing countries.

5. The specific comments of the Secretary-General which follow should be read in the context of the above general observations.

(a) Organization

RECOMMENDATION 1

The Secretary-General agrees that UNU should not become a degree-granting University with the requisite faculty such a step would entail, but should strive to improve its relationships with the world academic community as envisaged in the

Charter of the University. Nevertheless, the Secretary-General recognizes that the University continues to be faced with the problem of visibility in academic circles and with the public at large. The building of a permanent headquarters on the site in Tokyo, generously offered by the Government of Japan, will contribute to a more tangible image for the University. In this connexion, it is therefore important that the physical design of the headquarters be one that will serve both as a symbol of the institution and as a highly functional facility to enable the University to attract and perhaps also accommodate scholars from various parts of the world for defined time periods. The Secretary-General concurs that the incorporation of institutions into the UNU structure should be undertaken only if this serves defined long-term programme objectives. The Secretary-General welcomes efforts by the Council of the University to consider guidelines for incorporated institutions, including their method of financing and institutional, contractual and operational arrangements to ensure that the incorporation of institutions enhances efforts to fulfil the goals of the UNU Charter. The Secretary-General agrees with the Inspectors regarding the establishment of an Institute of Advanced Studies in Tokyo assuming that the costs of such an incorporated institution would not be met directly from the UNU budget but from other sources.

RECOMMENDATION 2

- (i) The Secretary-General concurs that the Council of UNU should be concerned mainly with over-all policy and less with day-to-day operations. The Council should determine, in consultation with the Rector, the periodicity of its meetings and should establish ad hoc committees for specific purposes.
- (ii) The Secretary-General agrees to intensify efforts to select, in so far as possible, Council members reflecting interests and concerns of the research community, including institutions associated with UNU. The Rector will continue to be consulted informally by the Secretary-General on the appointment of new Council members.
- (iii) The Secretary-General believes that directors or members of associated institutions should be able to voice their opinions to the relevant organ or body of UNU in a manner to be decided by the Rector in consultation with the UNU Council and the Advisory Committee.

RECOMMENDATION 3

The Secretary-General believes that the organizational structure of UNU should reflect the management requirements of UNU, with a view to minimizing compartmentalization. The Rector, in consultation with the Council of the University, should determine the most appropriate method for achieving this goal.

RECOMMENDATION 4

The Secretary-General is also in general agreement with the JIU proposal to strengthen the intellectual capacity of UNU headquarters.

RECOMMENDATION 5

The Secretary-General believes that a planning and evaluation unit, if established by UNU, should remain small and should activate existing mechanisms, as much as possible, for planning and evaluation. A variety of modalities may be needed to assess the quality and relevance of UNU activities, including the use of consultants. Indicators may need to be agreed to measure the University's impact.

RECOMMENDATION 6

The Secretary-General recognizes that the University, based on experience to date, must use a variety of arrangements to attract highly qualified academic staff to the University Centre. Every effort should be made to balance consideration of staff commitment and security against the need for a flexible staffing policy. Secondment of administrative staff from organizations of the United Nations system should be encouraged. The role of the UNU Liaison Office in New York should be periodically evaluated in relation to the evolving needs of the University.

(b) Finance and budget

RECOMMENDATION 7

- (i) The Secretary-General concurs with the view that more energies should be applied to obtaining funding for specific programmes, keeping in mind that academic freedom is partly a function of financial independence.
- (ii) Continued efforts should also be made to broaden the base of the University's funding. It is vitally important that the support of the University be widely shared so that the capacities of the institution are not inhibited from serving the needs and interests of all nations.
- (iii) With respect to contributions in non-convertible currencies, the Secretary-General believes it is advisable to identify beforehand the actual use to be made of such currencies in order to minimize the increase in the administrative work of maintaining separate accounts for unused currencies.
- (iv) The Secretary-General concurs with the proposal to form groups to assist the University in its fund-raising, and notes with satisfaction that the practice of creating national councils for UNU has been initiated.

(c) Functions and activities

RECOMMENDATION 8

The Secretary-General agrees with the proposal that the relationship between the Tokyo Centre and the associated institutions of the University should be established and strengthened, and supports the view that the UNU Council should have an active role in this matter. Moreover, efforts are needed to encourage short-term arrangements with associated institutions with possibilities for renewal and synchronization with the rolling plan of the University.

RECOMMENDATION 9

- (i) The Secretary-General believes that priority activities should be identified in order to effectively allocate resources.
- (ii) The concept of a rolling plan is supported by the Secretary-General as one which could be introduced effectively as a budgeting tool into the present planning process as reflected in the Medium-Term Perspective 1982-1987.

RECOMMENDATION 10

The Secretary-General concurs with the view that UNU should not be overly ambitious in training, but should seek to strengthen its fellowship programme. Further research on teaching methodologies, including methods aimed at achieving global perspectives, should also be undertaken.

RECOMMENDATION 11

The Secretary-General believes that the success of UNU will largely stem from its ability to generate ideas that spark the imagination and that offer new insights into problems and issues before the world community. The Secretary-General therefore agrees with the Inspectors that the information and dissemination policies of the University should focus on publicizing such research results.

RECOMMENDATION 12

The Secretary-General believes that the information retrieval system proposals of UNU should be further reviewed in the light of the work of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on strengthening the co-ordination of information systems in the United Nations system.

RECOMMENDATION 13

The Secretary-General agrees that the United Nations University should explore new areas of importance to the United Nations organizations and should seek, as appropriate, to co-operate and co-ordinate with these bodies. The Secretary-General believes that the University should not hesitate to take a critical stance, if necessary, and thereby contribute to efforts to strengthen the capacity of the United Nations to fulfil the goals of its Charter.

RECOMMENDATION 14

The Secretary-General concurs that the United Nations University and the University for Peace should work closely together on issues of international peace, security and global transformation.

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RECOMMENDATION 15

The Secretary-General believes that UNU should be fully cognizant of its position in relation to other research institutions in the United Nations system, many of them specialized in specific areas of research. Whenever feasible, efforts should be made to develop joint activities. Duplication of activities should be avoided, particularly as this may enhance competition for funding among these various institutions and the University. Opportunities for UNU involvement as a collaborating institution within the framework of the global projects of the United Nations Development Programme should be further explored.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 31 (A/37/31), para. 44.
