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### JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

#### Communications in the United Nations system

#### Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Communications in the United Nations system" (A/37/372).

ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

1. The large majority of organizational elements that commented on the contents of the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "Communications in the United Nations system" (A/37/372) expressed their general agreement with the broad thrust of both the objectives and recommendations of the report of JIU. As stated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the report "rather than restricting itself purely to past statistics and existing problems of traditional communications, rightly stresses the importance of telematics and the advantage for the organizations of the United Nations family to make effective use of new technologies". However, while the report is endorsed by the large majority of organizations as most timely and comprehensive, the World Health Organization (WHO) expressed doubt as to whether a serious problem relating to communications does in fact exist within the United Nations system. While agreeing with JIU that communications are in a state of constant evolution, WHO considers that, on the whole, organizations do follow these developments and that new methods "are used according to requirements". This applies particularly to electronic channels which, for any highly decentralized organization, cannot be exploited as fully as they are by "centralized and mainly Headquarters-run organizations".
2. For its part, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) feels that JIU "appears to exaggerate the lack of awareness on the part of decision-makers on communications matters and the lack of attention, in budgetary reviews, to medium- and long-term cost-effectiveness of present-day choices" in this particular field.
3. This being said, the report is generally viewed as containing important guidelines which organizations of the United Nations system should examine carefully and follow to the largest possible extent. This applies in particular to those recommendations of JIU which concern the greater use of electronic methods and means of communicating. Subject to the above-mentioned reservation expressed by WHO, organizations are satisfied that much more attention can and should be paid to techniques such as those mentioned by the World Food Programme (WFP), e.g. electronic mail, message switching and computerized facilities. However, in its comments the ILO pointed out that "modern telecommunications techniques which are already available and cost effective" in some parts of the world may be less so in other parts "due to different tariff structures, the monopoly of national PTTs and the state of the art in the area of packet switching networks and satellite communications". It should also be observed that, in terms of specific means, the recommendation that voice-conferencing be more widely used has received a mixed reception. It is often felt that the existence of different cultural patterns and thought processes may render this form of communicating more difficult than it would appear at first glance (ILO and WHO).
4. In so far as satellite facilities are concerned, there exists broad agreement with the JIU report that it would be impractical and unnecessarily expensive for the United Nations system to acquire its own earth stations. As in the case of the United Nations, the preference goes to the leasing of facilities from organizations

that already own such equipment. For its part, the WFP is linked up with a private satellite network for communicating with shipping agents. It is the general view that the United Nations should endeavour to acquire satellite channels to facilitate communications with specialized agencies and field offices.

5. In regard to the recommendation of JIU advocating the creation of an ad hoc interagency committee on communications, it is generally felt that, prior to consideration of the policy aspects of telecommunications questions, it would be preferable that the technical aspects of these questions be reviewed within the existing mechanisms for interagency co-ordination.

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