



The Joint Inspection Unit in the oversight framework of the United Nations system

This article is part of an ongoing series to commemorate the Joint Inspection Unit's 50th anniversary and highlight the JIU's work and achievements over the last 50 years.

Given the nature of its mandate the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) acted as an early promoter of strong oversight frameworks and functions across the United Nations system, both from a system-wide perspective and within each individual organization. The Statute of the JIU, adopted in 1976 gives it a prominent role to inspect, evaluate and investigate the operations of participating organizations. Its system-wide mandate provides the JIU with a unique opportunity to review crosscutting issues and to be an agent for promoting reform in governing bodies across the United Nations system in order to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of mandates and enhance co-ordination between organizations.

JIU's contribution to fostering an oversight culture in the United Nations system

In 1993 the JIU issued a report on accountability and oversight in the United Nations Secretariat which examined the advantages of a single consolidated oversight unit covering inspection, evaluation and investigation functions and reporting directly to the governing bodies and the executive heads. The identified advantages included greater flexibility and responsiveness, less overlap, better coordination, economies of scale and enhanced professionalism.

While conducting the 2006 review on Oversight Lacunae, a landmark report produced by the JIU, the Inspectors reiterated that the executive heads should review the structure of the internal oversight in their respective organizations, and ensure that it properly covers the oversight functions:

Executive heads should review the current structure of internal oversight in their respective organizations and ensure that: (a) Audit, inspection, investigation and evaluation functions are consolidated in a single unit

under the head of internal oversight reporting directly to the executive head; (b) Any functions other than the four oversight functions should be positioned elsewhere in the secretariats and not in the internal oversight unit. (Recommendation 6 - JIU/REP/2006/2)

Over the years, the JIU has produced a series of reports reviewing oversight functions as they existed in the United Nations system. These reviews contributed to a better comparative analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the respective oversight functions as they were implemented in the United Nations system.

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The JIU reports have consistently proposed practical recommendations that serve to promote an independent and efficient internal oversight function. For example, in 2006, there were only two independent oversight/audit committees that existed in the United Nations system. The Inspectors recommended that the legislative bodies of each United Nations system organization should establish an independent external oversight board composed of five to seven members. There was prompt implementation of the JIU's recommendation by many organizations. In a survey carried out by the JIU in 2015, 18 out of 22 participating organizations stated they had established such oversight committee.

Member States and oversight

One of the JIU's primary objectives is to assist the governing bodies of its participating organizations. Implementation of JIU recommendations is an important part of achieving this goal. In order to allow Member States to better monitor the implementation of recommendations, the JIU launched an innovative online tracking system in 2012 to trace the implementation of its recommendations. It also allows the Member States to track the consideration of JIU reports, and the status of acceptance, implementation of recommendations and the impact achieved by participating organizations. This facilitates meeting Member States' governance responsibilities in respect of their oversight function and management of human, financial and other resources by the respective secretariats. The tracking system was the first web based follow-up system in the United Nations. The system has proven to be a success in generating statistics on acceptance and implementation of recommendations. The JIU has encouraged more organizations to follow the same approach to achieve more effective oversight impact.

Cooperation with other oversight bodies

JIU puts great effort in cooperation with other oversight bodies. Regular coordination meetings are held annually with the Board of Auditors and the Office of Internal Oversight Services of the United Nations Secretariat. The objective is to avoid duplication and overlaps in the respective oversight programmes of work, and minimize gaps in coverage. In addition, bilateral ad hoc interactions at the working level takes place often to share experiences, knowledge, best practices and lessons learned. The Unit also meets on a regular basis with the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.

JIU has worked on fostering relations with other relevant United Nations system oversight and coordination bodies. It participates, as an observer, in several professional audit, evaluation and investigation forums, including the Representatives of Internal Audit Services of the United Nations Organizations and Multilateral Financial Institutions (RIAS), the United Nations Evaluation Group and the Conference of Investigators of United Nations organizations.

Examples of Joint Inspection Unit reports on oversight functions since 1993

1993	Report on Accountability and Oversight in the United Nations Secretariat	Report on Accountability, Management and oversight in the United Nations	1995
1998	Report on More coherence for enhanced oversight in the United Nations System	Report on Strengthening the investigations function in the United Nations system organizations	2000
2004	Report on Delegation of Authority and Accountability	Report on Oversight lacunae in the United Nations system	2006
2010	Report on the audit function in the United Nations system	Report on Accountability Frameworks in the United Nations System	2011
2011	Report on the Investigation function in the United Nations System	Report on the Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations system	2014
2016	Fraud prevention, detection and response in United Nations system organizations	State of the internal audit functions in the United Nations system*	2016

*to be issued at the end of the year

((Enhancing efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency across the United Nations system))