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Joint Inspection Unit

Review of the follow-up to the Joint Inspection Unit recommendations by the United Nations system organizations

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly his comments and those of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Outcome of the review of the follow-up to the Joint Inspection Unit reports and recommendations by the United Nations system organizations" (JIU/REP/2017/5).

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Summary

In its report entitled “Outcome of the review of the follow-up to the Joint Inspection Unit reports and recommendations by the United Nations system organizations” (JIU/REP/2017/5), the Joint Inspection Unit reviewed the acceptance and implementation of its recommendations by the participating organizations.

The present note reflects the views of organizations of the United Nations system on the recommendations provided in the report. The views have been consolidated on the basis of inputs provided by member organizations of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination, which welcomed the report and supported some of its conclusions.

I. Introduction

1. In its report entitled “Outcome of the review of the follow-up to the Joint Inspection Unit reports and recommendations by the United Nations system organizations” (JIU/REP/2017/5), the Joint Inspection Unit presented the results of the second phase of the review of the acceptance and implementation of its recommendations. The second phase had been conducted over a two-year period and was intended to draw lessons from the issues affecting the follow-up process and to identify good follow-up practices in order to enhance its functioning system-wide.

II. General comments

2. The organizations of the United Nations system welcome the review of the follow-up to the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit and support the general findings contained in the report and the best practices identified therein.

3. While the organizations appreciate the overall report quality of the report, they underscore the important distinction between the role and authority of executive heads and the role and authority of legislative bodies, particularly in reference to the agenda-setting and documentation for those bodies. The organizations note that, in the report, legislative bodies were considered in a one-size-fits-all approach, and that, in some cases, the proposals put forward would increase the time pressure on and the resources needed by boards and/or governing bodies for the consideration of the Joint Inspection Unit items and would entail associated costs or create time pressure for the discussion of other issues.

4. With regard to the audiences to whom the recommendations were addressed and the governance of the follow-up function of the Joint Inspection Unit, the organizations note the need for further clarification by the Unit regarding the process and the criteria that it used in addressing its recommendations to legislative bodies and to executive heads. The organizations also note that recommendations requiring decisions on the part of legislative bodies regarding management issues did not reflect the distinctions between those two types of audiences.

5. The organizations welcome the maturity matrix as a concrete basis for engagement regarding performance on Joint Inspection Unit matters, although organizations whose governing bodies either have decided not to consider the Unit’s recommendations or could not include them in the agenda of the meeting, observe that they are penalized by the assessment that recommendations have not been implemented. This leads to a decrease in the actual rates of acceptance and implementation of Unit recommendations by United Nations entities. Furthermore, the organizations observe that recommendations considered not relevant to a given entity should be factored out of the overall rating. In this regard, the organizations suggest that, in future reporting of such statistics, the fact that recommendations are not relevant and/or have not been accepted should be considered and the analysis adjusted.

6. A preference for the placement of the focal point function of the Joint Inspection Unit within the independent oversight body was expressed in the report. One organization considers the responsibilities of the Unit focal point, which require executive action on behalf of the executive head, to be inconsistent with the independence of the oversight office.

7. A number of questions were raised about the process used for addressing recommendations included in management letters, since such letters fall outside the

categories of reports, notes and confidential letters as defined in article 11 of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit.

III. Comments on specific recommendations

Recommendation 1

The executive heads of organizations who have not yet done so should enhance the consideration of Joint Inspection Unit reports/recommendations by their respective legislative bodies, in line with best/good practices identified, by the end of 2018.

8. Except when statutory provisions do not apply, as in the case of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the organizations partially support recommendation 1, noting that it is not aligned with the respective authorities, roles and responsibilities of the executive heads and legislative bodies. In particular, the organizations underscore that not all reports and recommendations receive the same level of interest on the part of a given legislative body and note that the agendas of the legislative bodies are set by their respective bureaux, not by their executive head or secretariat, including the consideration of Joint Inspection Unit reports.

9. While the organizations agree that efforts should be made to ensure the timely consideration of Joint Inspection Unit reports, in the specific case of the Main Committees of the General Assembly, it is noted that the current practice of bundling them together with relevant reports of the Secretary-General remains the most practical and convenient practice.

10. In the report, it was suggested that the sharing of full copies of Joint Inspection Unit reports[1] with Member States was preferable to the sharing of reports through hyperlinks. The organizations consider that, since the reports are available to the public on the Unit's website, the sharing of hyperlinks is more cost-effective and aligned with paper-smart/paperless and multilingualism requirements. The organizations also note that while Internet connectivity may not yet be universal (which the report identified as the reason that full reports are preferable), Internet is, as a rule, available to the government representatives and officials who participate in the discussions of legislative bodies on Unit matters.

11. In reference to the proposed good practice of preparing summaries of reports of the Joint Inspection Unit and comments of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) in participating organizations' reporting to legislative bodies as presented in box 1 of the report, the organizations question the added value of that proposal; in particular, they question the efficiency of the preparation by each of the 28 participating organizations of separate summaries, when executive summaries are already publicly available, and therefore consider that providing hyperlinks to the Unit and CEB documents is a best practice.

12. Lastly, it is suggested that the Joint Inspection Unit consider organizing briefings for interested delegations and present selected reports in greater depth, perhaps jointly with a group of organizations at the same duty station (e.g., New York, Geneva, Vienna or Rome).

Recommendation 2

The executive heads of organizations who have not yet done so are requested to propose to their legislative bodies a concrete course of action to be taken with

[1] See JIU/REP/2017/5, paragraph 46 and item 3 of the maturity matrix.

respect to the recommendations of the Joint Inspection Unit addressed to these bodies, especially with regard to system-wide and several organization reports, by the end of 2018.

13. The organizations support recommendation 2 in part or in full, unless statutory restrictions apply, and agree that legislative body engagement on recommendations for their action is fundamental for the effective consideration of Joint Inspection Unit recommendations. The organizations reiterate that, in line with their response to recommendation 1, it is the sole prerogative of the membership of the legislative bodies to formulate and decide on the course of action to be taken and the final text of the decision in question, and that the secretariat of an organization may merely indicate the need for a decision through a neutral text.

Recommendation 3

The General Assembly of the United Nations may wish to request the Secretary-General to make proposals to enhance the decision-making process on Joint Inspection Unit reports and recommendations, in consultation with the Unit, by the end of 2019, including the possibility of reverting to the practices that were applicable prior to the adoption of resolution 59/267.

14. The organizations generally agree with recommendation 3, noting that it is addressed to the General Assembly. Furthermore, the organizations note that participating organizations already report on actions taken in response to Joint Inspection Unit recommendations through the Unit's web-based tracking system, which is accessible to Member States.

Recommendation 4

The legislative bodies of organizations which have not yet done so should request annual follow-up reports on the implementation of prior years' accepted Joint Inspection Unit recommendations until their full implementation, by the end of 2018.

15. While recommendation 4 is addressed to legislative bodies, the organizations note that providing further details over a longer period of time may require a different approach in terms of reporting — and related timing — to the bodies in question (particularly as it refers to the boards of funds and programmes).

Recommendation 5

The executive heads of organizations who have not yet done so should introduce appropriate verification and monitoring procedures on the implementation of prior years' accepted Joint Inspection Unit recommendations until their full implementation, by the end of 2018.

16. The organizations generally support recommendation 5. However, they welcome clarification on the costs/benefits of further verification through an additional independent channel, different from the one used by the Unit. The organizations also note that a better web-based tracking system would improve the monitoring process and related statistics.

17. Furthermore, the organizations observe that existing processes may effectively vet the responses cost-effectively, without the establishment of additional layers of verification processes. For example, if the status of recommendations is reported in detail to a legislative body, the due diligence in place for the clearance of intergovernmental documents should provide a level of assurance that the action taken is accurately reflected.

Recommendation 6

The executive heads of organizations, when considering Joint Inspection Unit recommendations intended to enhance coordination and cooperation, should propose the inclusion of the consideration of these recommendations on the programme of work of CEB and its applicable mechanisms with a timeline for taking a decision, with effect from 2019.

18. The organizations are generally supportive of recommendation 6 and emphasize that the agenda of CEB is decided through a consultative process led by the Secretary-General as its Chair.

Recommendation 7

The executive heads of organizations who have not yet done so should establish a direct reporting line from the Joint Inspection Unit focal point to top management.

19. The organizations support recommendation 7 and consider that management accountability and responsibility for the executive function carried out by the Joint Inspection Unit focal point are essential to its effectiveness.