

# 50 years of the Joint Inspection Unit

*This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). The JIU, which has been hosted by the United Nations Office at Geneva since its beginning, was officially established during the 21st session of the United Nations General Assembly as the only independent external oversight body of the United Nations system.*

## JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

### Origins of the JIU

The JIU was initially created on a temporary basis in November 1966 under General Assembly Resolution 2150 (XXI) after an Ad Hoc Committee of Experts determined that external oversight over the UN system's financial management was necessary. At that time of its creation, the JIU was a most innovative creation of the General Assembly, as it was and still is the only entity charged with conducting inspections, evaluations and investigations system-wide.

Under Resolution 31/192, the General Assembly adopted the statute of the JIU, thereby changing its status from that of a temporary body to a permanent one. This resolution firmly institutionalized the Unit as the only external oversight body empowered with a system-wide mandate. The JIU's Statute went into effect on 1st January 1978.

The JIU is composed of 11 eleven Inspectors elected by the United Nations General Assembly to guarantee their independence and to which they are accountable in the discharge of their functions. The unique feature of the JIU is its system-wide competence to all United Nations organizations that have accepted its statute (currently 28). As a subsidiary body of the governing bodies of its participating organizations, the JIU reports are directly addressed to Member States and is therefore detached from the internal management structure of the organizations, further reinforcing its independence.

As part of its mission, the JIU assists the legislative organs of its participating organizations in meeting their governance responsibilities in respect of their oversight function concerning the management of human, financial and other resources by the respective secretariats. In its reports and notes, the JIU looks at cross-cutting issues and seeks to identify best practices, propose benchmarks and facilitate information-sharing throughout all the

organizations of the United Nations system. In that spirit, for the past 50 years, the JIU has sought to serve as an agent for change across the UN system. JIU works to secure management and administrative efficiency and greater coordination between UN agencies together with other internal and external oversight bodies.

### JIU Work Over the Years

Over the past 50 years, the JIU has focused on a number of issues related to oversight, management and administration, seeking to improve policies and practices both at the system-wide and individual organization levels. JIU reports have covered a range of topics from human resources management (Staff Recruitment in United Nations system organizations: A comparative analysis and benchmarking framework: Overview) to results-based management (Results-based budgeting: the experience of United Nations system organizations), to accountability and oversight (Oversight Lacunae in the United Nations System), each outlining in great detail several recommendations for improving how the UN system operates.

"The JIU has come a long way since its founding and is an integral component of the United Nations System," said JIU Chair Inspector Achamkulangare Gopinathan. "We have experienced a great deal of success over the past 50 years and hope to continue that success in the future."

To continue to enhance its usefulness and track down the use of its recommendations, one of the JIU's biggest successes to date is the launching of its web-based tracking system (WBTS), an online follow-up system allowing JIU participating organizations to provide data on the recommendations JIU has provided them. This mechanism greatly helped improve the follow-up system as it helps avoid duplicate data entry and record keeping, while enhancing reporting facilities. The WBTS also offers Member States a central repository of JIU work and real-time access to review status of recommendations and implementations.

## 50th Anniversary Campaign in Fall 2016

JIU's 50th anniversary represents an opportunity for the Unit to reflect upon its progress on many fronts while recommitting itself to better serving the interests of the United Nations Member States and its participating organizations. To commemorate this occasion, the JIU is launching a communications campaign this fall, during which the Unit will engage in a number of events and activities. The main event will be a high-level panel on the topic of oversight in the United Nations system and the challenges and opportunities for the Unit in the future featuring: Ms. Heidi Mendonza, United Nations Under Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, OIOS; Mr. Malcom Johnson, International Telecommunications Union Deputy Secretary-General; Mr. Gopinathan Achamkulangare, Chair, Joint Inspection Unit. The JIU will also publish a series of articles highlighting JIU's work and achievements since 1966.

## Interview of Mr. Achamkulangare



Gopinathan  
Achamkulangare,  
Chair, Joint  
Inspection Unit

### What are the responsibilities of the Chair of the JIU?

Article 18 of the JIU statute defines the responsibilities of the Chair as playing a coordinating role in respect of the Unit's programme of work for the year; of being the formal channel of communication with the competent bodies and the executive heads of the organizations, and of representing the Unit, as necessary, at meetings of the organizations and performing on the Unit's behalf such other functions as it may decide.

### In your opinion, what have been the main Unit's accomplishments in conducting its oversight mandate from a system-wide perspective over the last five decades?

The achievements of the Unit over the last five decades are too numerous to encapsulate here: suffice it to say that many of the system-wide reform measures were all anticipated by the Unit well before others began thinking about them. The old-timers in the Unit often say, only half-jokingly, that the Unit has been always ahead of the curve, usually by ten years or so. The most

recent example is the procedure adopted by the President of the 70th session of the General Assembly in introducing a novel procedure of interviewing the candidates for UN Secretary General – I wonder how many of our readers know that this was indeed a recommendation from one of the JIU reports authored by Ambassador Mounir Zahran, former Inspector.

### What are the major challenges for the JIU in fulfilling its mandate providing relevant, useful and timely system-wide independent oversight?

At the time that the JIU was established five decades ago, the field of oversight was not a crowded one; however, as years

went by, it became so. This meant that the resources available for the JIU came down substantially, instead of keeping pace with the increased demands and requirements of oversight. How else can one explain the stagnation, or in fact, the decrease in real terms, of the resources made available to the JIU over more than two decades? Other related challenges include those with regard to upgradation of the skill-sets of the staff, more training opportunities for them, strengthening and expansion of the secretariat with more professional staff and so on. ■

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