



ARTICLE 5 - JIU60

Strengthening Oversight Through Member State Engagement

This article is part of a series commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations system highlighting its mandate, evolution and contribution to the United Nations system over the last six decades.

As reaffirmed by the United Nations General Assembly in various resolutions, the Joint Inspection Unit is the only external, independent, system-wide oversight body in the United Nations system. The role of Member States central in shaping, sustaining and maximizing the impact of the JIU's work. At a time of financial constraints and increased scrutiny, their engagement in ensuring effective oversight is more critical than ever.

Through the appointment of Inspectors, the consideration of recommendations addressed to governing or legislative bodies and the follow-up actions requested from executive heads, Member States are not passive recipients of JIU reports. They are integral to the Unit's authority, effectiveness and long-term relevance.

Appointing Independent Inspectors

Member States play a foundational role in the JIU through the appointment of its Inspectors. The eleven Inspectors are elected by the United Nations General Assembly for a five-year term.

Candidates are nominated by Member States and considered within their respective regional groups before election by the General Assembly. This process reinforces both independence and legitimacy: Inspectors serve in their personal capacity and do not represent national interests, but their appointment by Member States ensures accountability to the intergovernmental community as a whole.

Through this mechanism, Member States directly shape the leadership and strategic direction of the Unit. The Unit is composed of three Inspectors from the Western Europe and Others Group, and two Inspectors each from the Africa, Asia-Pacific, Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean regional groups.

Considering Reports and Acting on Recommendations

The JIU reports directly to legislative organs and governing bodies, not to executive management. This structure reflects a deliberate governance choice: oversight findings are meant to inform Member States in their governance role.

Upon issuance, reports are formally submitted to the legislative or governing body of each participating organization, which may:

- take note of the report, including its findings, conclusions and recommendations;
- endorse all recommendations or only specific ones;
- request follow-up reporting; or
- request executive heads to implement specific measures.

The impact of JIU recommendations depends significantly on the depth of engagement by governing bodies. Evidence over time shows that, when Member States actively discuss recommendations, request updates and integrate findings into decision-making processes, implementation rates tend to increase.

To support this engagement, the JIU produces both comprehensive analytical reports and shorter, targeted summaries tailored to Member States, enabling both in-depth review and efficient oversight.

Commissioning Reviews: Expressions of Trust

Member States also play a direct role in requesting or mandating specific reviews, in line with article 9 of the JIU Statute.

In certain instances, governing bodies have formally commissioned the Unit to undertake reviews on matters of systemic relevance. For example, following governance concerns within UNOPS, the Executive Boards of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UNICEF requested the JIU to carry out an assessment of how their Executive Boards execute their governance and oversight functions, with a view to ensuring that these functions are aligned with international standards and best practices. The resulting report (JIU/REP/2023/7) now serves as a reference point for harmonized governance approaches across multiple UN entities.

Similarly, the governing body of the World Meteorological Organization requested a JIU review of its governance framework in 2025.

Such mandates reflect strong institutional trust in the JIU's independence and analytical capacity. Member States turn to the JIU when independent, system-wide analysis is needed to support reform and restore confidence. Importantly, requests for reviews are most effective when they arise from governing bodies through inclusive and consensual processes. This ensures that the scope and objectives of a review align with institutional priorities and benefit from broad support.

Shaping the Programme of Work

Member States play a role in the development of the JIU's annual Programme of Work.

In preparing its annual programme, the JIU considers:

- requests from legislative organs and governing bodies (see above);
- suggestions from executive heads;
- input from oversight and coordination bodies across the UN system; and
- the Unit's own assessment of emerging systemic risks and priorities.

Once adopted, the Unit's Programme of Work is transmitted to the United Nations General Assembly through the Secretary-General and is then issued as an official UN document. This process ensures transparency and enables Member States to follow and engage with upcoming reviews.

Follow-Up in Intergovernmental Forums

Beyond the formal adoption of reports, Member States reinforce oversight through discussions in the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly and other governing forums. These discussions provide opportunities to examine recommendation trends, implementation challenges and systemic risks.

In some cases, the JIU presents its findings directly to groups of Member States, particularly when reports address sensitive issues like whistle-blower protection or prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, both of which have been the subject of recent JIU reviews. These exchanges strengthen dialogue and ensure that oversight findings are understood in context.

Maximizing Impact: Engagement Beyond New York and Geneva

The effectiveness of system-wide oversight also depends on information flow.

As part of its outreach efforts, the JIU circulates reports and key announcements to governing body delegates across major duty stations in the interest of enhanced accessibility and transparency.

Effective oversight depends not only on access to information, but on its use. Member States can further maximize impact by:

- sharing relevant JIU findings with technical counterparts in line ministries in capitals;
- integrating recommendations into national oversight discussions; and
- promoting informed debate at the capital level.

Such engagement helps bridge the gap between intergovernmental deliberations and operational realities.

Oversight as a Shared Responsibility

The United Nations General Assembly recognizes that the Unit's system-wide effectiveness is a shared responsibility between the Unit, Member States and the secretariats of participating organizations.

The JIU provides independent analysis and recommendations, while executive heads are responsible for implementation. Member States, through legislative and governing bodies, close the accountability loop by reviewing findings, setting expectations and tracking progress, and ensuring recommendations addressed to them are implemented.

As the United Nations system navigates financial constraints, reform agendas and heightened scrutiny, the role of Member States in supporting effective oversight becomes even more critical. Independent system-wide analysis can only translate into meaningful change when it is actively used and acted upon. Strengthening the JIU therefore goes hand in hand with strengthening Member State engagement in informed, evidence-based governance across the United Nations system.

“ *Effective system-wide oversight is strengthened when Member States actively exercise their role within a shared responsibility framework.* ”



Inspector Conrod HUNTE,
Chair of the Joint Inspection Unit for the year 2026