



ARTICLE 7 - JIU60

Interview with former Inspector Wolfgang Münch

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.

This interview features insights from Mr. Wolfgang Münch, who served as a member of the Unit from 1996 to 2005. Drawing on his experience as an Inspector, he reflects on the Unit's institutional culture, the evolution of system-wide oversight, and the key developments that have shaped the JIU's oversight role within the UN system. His reflections offer a candid and insightful look at the challenges, reforms and enduring principles that continue to guide the Unit as it marks its 60th anniversary.

When you first became an Inspector in 1996, what struck you most about the JIU - both in terms of its institutional culture and its role within the UN system? What were the main challenges facing the Unit at that time?



Wolfgang Münch

At times, stakeholders' engagement with the JIU was uneven. The JIU was not always taken seriously, not only by participating organizations as such, but also by some high-ranking officials. I recall an instance where the JIU counterpart refused to respond to a questionnaire arguing that the subject would not be of interest to the organization. The author of that statement did not realize that the JIU is a subsidiary body of the legislative organ of the organization and taken account of article 6.2 of the Statute.

It also surprised me that the JIU had to justify its "raison d'être". For example, in 1995, an executive head of a participating organization had suggested to Member States that the organization should withdraw from the Statute of the Unit due to cost savings. The proposal was rejected by the organization's Member States: they regarded it as totally inappropriate that the entity head would suggest to Member States the abolition of an external oversight body.

In your 1998 article, you described the JIU as a "comprehensive oversight institution." How would you characterize the evolution of that role from the Unit's creation in 1966 through to the late 1990s, and how has the nature of system-wide oversight changed since then?



Wolfgang Münch

The JIU has progressively worked towards a more balanced programme of work which reflects the expectations of the intended audience of its reports, i.e., looking at issues of system-wide relevance or issues that affect more than one participating organization.

Furthermore, the Unit strengthened its cooperation with other oversight institutions in the United Nations system; for instance, by holding regular meetings with the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) and the United Nations Board of Auditors (BOA).

Safeguarding independence has always been central to the JIU's credibility. From your experience, what were the main challenges in maintaining independence while engaging constructively with UN entities and other oversight bodies?



Wolfgang Münch

Like all oversight institutions, the JIU can be hampered by budgetary constraints. When resources are constrained, oversight choices are imposed by capacity rather than priorities, which can weaken independence.

The same applies to the risk of being cut off from information necessary to conduct the oversight reviews.

A specific challenge in my time was, in isolated cases, the prolonged process of the issuance of visas in the preparatory phase of an Inspector's or staff member's mission.

Independence must be balanced with accountability and collective responsibility within the Unit. Greater coordination mechanisms within the Unit, particularly through a strengthened role of the Chair, could enhance collective ownership and effectiveness.

During your tenure, what developments or reforms within the JIU were particularly decisive in strengthening its credibility, legitimacy or long-term impact?



Wolfgang Münch

I see the following elements:

- The establishment of a follow-up system aimed at ensuring consistent tracking and reporting on the implementation of JIU recommendations across participating organizations;
- The spirit of resolution 50/233 of the General Assembly, which emphasizes that the "impact of the Unit on the cost-effectiveness of activities within the United Nations system is a shared responsibility of the Member States, the Unit and the secretariats of the participating organizations". Many subsequent resolutions referred to this resolution. Member States started to attach more importance to JIU reports, and gradually, they moved on from the practice of just taking note of certain recommendations to endorsing them, at least partially.

Over time, the work of the JIU also gained recognition in academic circles, further reinforcing its legitimacy and influence. The Max-Planck-Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law, editor of the Encyclopedia of Public International Law decided approximately 20 years ago that "JIU" should be inserted as a standalone term into the encyclopedia. I was invited to deliver the text. You could observe that the Unit as such and reports were referred to more and more often in academic literature thereafter. Also, the Technical University of Munich undertook a major JIU-related research project a few years ago, where current and former Inspectors were interviewed.

Implementation of recommendations has historically been a challenge for oversight bodies. In your view, how were follow-up and impact measured during your time as Inspector, and do you see significant differences today?



Wolfgang Münch

In the early days of my tenure, the follow-up system was rather marginal. Numerous recommendations contained in JIU reports were not endorsed by legislative organs. If they were, or if recommendations were accepted by participating organizations' secretariats, follow-up was undertaken only on an ad-hoc basis. In the late 1990s, the first follow-up system was developed and thereafter fine-tuned, step by step. I understand a new Recommendations Tracking System is planned to be released this year to further improve follow-up effectiveness.

As the JIU marks its 60th anniversary, what do you see as the strongest elements of continuity in its mission, and where should the Unit continue to evolve to remain relevant and authoritative?



Wolfgang Münch

The JIU has to continue developing a well-balanced work programme for each year reflecting the system-wide mandate of the Unit. It should also ensure a reasonable duration for its reviews and timely issuance of reports. It may sometimes be necessary to escalate matters to governing bodies in cases where participating organization secretariats may make attempts to hinder JIU reports from being part of the agenda of meetings of legislative organs.

The JIU's online presence deserves merit. It has helped a lot to make the Unit better known among delegates and to also showcase its transparency. It would be useful to have more regular reporting on pertinent developments, such as JIU meetings with other oversight bodies and heads of participating organizations.

Key areas of contribution

During his tenure, Wolfgang Münch contributed to JIU reports on a wide range of management and oversight issues, including results-based management, outsourcing, investigations, delegation of authority, common services and administrative reform across the United Nations system.

- [Read the reports and notes prepared by Inspector Münch during his tenure with the JIU.](#)
- [Read Inspector Münch's 1998 article: Münch, Wolfgang, "The Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations and the Specialized Agencies: The Role and Working Methods of a Comprehensive Oversight Institution in the United Nations System". *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law Online*, vol. 2, No.1 \(January 1998\), p. 287-306.](#)

“The JIU had to justify its *raison d'être*, but over time, its value became increasingly recognized.”



Wolfgang Münch,
Former Inspector of the JIU