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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness  
in implementing legislative mandates

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to submit to the General Assembly his comments on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled "United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates" (JIU/REP/97/2), which is contained in document A/51/946. The JIU report was prepared pursuant to General Assembly resolution 50/206 C of 23 December 1995.

ANNEX

Comments of the Secretary-General

INTRODUCTION

1. The comprehensive report entitled "United Nations publications: enhancing cost-effectiveness in implementing legislative mandates" (JIU/REP/97/2), prepared by Inspectors Fatih Bouayad-Agha, Sumihiro Kuyama and Wolfgang Munch, has been received with great interest. It is clear that author departments were extensively consulted in the course of the preparation of the report and in many instances their views are reflected. This valuable assessment by the Inspectors is very welcome, and it is hoped that their recommendations will serve to further rationalize the publications programme of the United Nations.

2. United Nations publications make a unique intellectual contribution to furthering the aims of the Organization. The sheer magnitude of this publishing endeavour is evidenced in the consolidated publications programme for the biennium 1996-1997, which contains 1,627 titles produced by the Secretariat in New York, Geneva, and Vienna and by the regional commissions. Those publications, disseminated by the United Nations to Governments and civil society around the world, are a visible and concrete manifestation of the range of knowledge and expertise available within the Secretariat.

3. Publications are an important means through which the Secretariat implements the mandates given to it by intergovernmental bodies. Departments are expected to review their publications programmes in the context of the reform plan for the Organization. Emphasis should be placed on identifying areas of strength where competencies have been developed; reducing fragmentation of skills and duplication of efforts; raising the quality of analyses and operations; and streamlining and rationalizing delivery capacities. In an important initiative, the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, in which the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the regional commissions and the United Nations Environment Programme participate, has launched a thorough review of all major United Nations economic and social publications.

4. The recently issued report of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities rightly states that the Organization's very survival depends upon its ability to communicate its message and its activities effectively to an increasingly cost-resistant world. Publications are without question a key tool in building awareness and improving the image of the Organization.

5. It is worthwhile here to recall an earlier JIU report on publications policy and practice in the United Nations system that was issued in 1984. That report reflected an Organization in which new publishing technology was only just beginning to be utilized. Since then, publishing has changed dramatically, both within and outside the Organization. A key element of the Secretary-General's reform plan for the Organization is the enhancement of the ability to move towards creating an "electronic United Nations". Today, the United Nations

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has its own acclaimed Internet site, which currently registers over 5 million "hits" each month. The United Nations Treaty Collection on the Internet alone receives more than 100,000 hits monthly. More details of United Nations electronic publishing initiatives appear below under recommendations 2 and 14.

6. Some JIU recommendations from the previous report, such as the request for a more flexible attribution of authorship policy and the call for United Nations publishing to take full advantage of developments in printing technology, have been translated into practice. Other aspects of publications policy covered in the 1984 report are still relevant and are discussed in the current report. These include, among others, the need for a balance between free and sales publications, as well as for a more positive approach to sales; the importance of targeting publications; and the desirability of feedback mechanisms and readership surveys.

7. The budgetary reductions made by departments in 1996 and 1997 resulted in the termination, curtailment and deferral of a number of publications originally proposed in the programme budget for the current biennium. This is a clear indication that departments are indeed reviewing and prioritizing the publications in their programmes. This trend will continue as all entities of the Organization work to maximize their resources at a time of major structural reform. In many parts of the United Nations, progress is already being made in rationalizing publications, eliminating duplication and ensuring that publications are produced in the most cost-effective manner.

#### SPECIFIC COMMENTS

Recommendation 1. All United Nations substantive legislative bodies should include, in their respective programme of work, an agenda on publications, and based on the substantive inputs by the Secretariat, should proceed with the following objectives: to review and assess all existing publications programmes in terms of relevance to mandates and usefulness for attaining the objectives of mandates, and to identify possible duplication among existing publications (within the United Nations and between the United Nations and organizations inside and outside the United Nations system) and to come up with appropriate proposals on the consolidation and/or elimination of publications.

8. Comments on this recommendation should be read in conjunction with those made on recommendation 5, which also addresses the subject of mandates.

9. It is understood that the substantive legislative bodies that report to the General Assembly necessarily play an important role in determining both the need for and the general content of publications, as well as in monitoring and evaluating the resulting outputs. In this connection, the Inspectors' observation that the Statistical Commission, the Commission on Population and Development and the Committee on Information could be considered to be relatively well-functioning legislative bodies is a positive one. In addition, the Department of Public Information submits a detailed report on its publications to the Committee on Information at its annual sessions, during which the Committee reviews the work of the Department.

10. Increased interest in publications on the part of intergovernmental bodies, as well as their guidance on some of the broader issues relating to publications prepared under their mandates, would be welcomed. However, it is perhaps not realistic to expect that the views of those bodies taken alone would be the most informed on matters such as sales and marketability, public information and public dissemination questions, and costing and budgeting. With specific regard to publications in the area of technical cooperation, it has been pointed out that efficiency and cost-effectiveness would not be enhanced by subjecting each of such publications to intergovernmental scrutiny.

11. A variety of standardized feedback mechanisms are used by the Organization to determine the worth of its many unique publications. This information is sought through various means such as questionnaires polling sales customers and evaluations and readership surveys prepared by substantive departments. However, as the JIU report points out, readership and marketing surveys in particular are a limited tool. They are labour-intensive in terms of preparation and analysis of results. While electronic surveys may be conducted in future on the Internet in order to reach a wider audience, the Inspectors state that past experience with electronic surveys has been disappointing. But there are other means to gauge how United Nations publications are received and to what extent they are valued. Permission is regularly sought to reprint United Nations publications in whole or in part, as well as to translate and produce them in non-official languages. Several hundred requests for use of United Nations materials are processed by the secretariat of the Publications Board each year from academics, non-governmental organizations, commercial publishers and individuals. Also, unsolicited comments from readers, especially from senior officials, are frequently received.

12. The Inspectors suggest that there might be an overuse of the publications option within the Organization. It should be pointed out that some departments, such as the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or the Department of Public Information, have more flexibility than do others with regard to the means they utilize to fulfil their mandates. It is, however, clear that the publications option is an essential one for most areas of the Secretariat. In the end, it must be left to the departments to consider the options, other than publications, at their disposal for implementing their legislative mandates.

13. It should be emphasized in regard to the Inspectors' concern about producing the same publication in different formats that this is an infrequent practice. The Working Committee of the Publications Board is very sensitive to the need to avoid this type of duplication. In some cases, however, a report is issued for which interest and demand is exceedingly high and perhaps unforeseen. An example is the publication Critical Trends: Global Change and Sustainable Development, which was issued in a second, glossier version with colour charts and graphs. This was done at the specific request of Member States. The report of the International Law Commission is issued quickly for General Assembly consideration and then is incorporated into the Yearbook of the International Law Commission, thereby becoming part of the Commission's permanent record. In this form a greater degree of verification and accuracy is required.

14. The use of more powerful desktop publishing equipment and software in all languages and of digital reproduction techniques has made it possible to

eliminate many of the provisional simplified versions of Official Records that had to be produced in the past in order to meet short processing deadlines. For the first time this year, it has not been necessary to produce the advance versions of the annual report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization, of the report of the Security Council and of several other Supplements to the Official Records of the General Assembly. The same resources and a realignment of editorial work have been used successfully to issue the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly during the main part of its fifty-first session in final form, as part of the Official Records, during the first week in April, while in previous years this publication was not available until July or August.

15. It would be difficult to address duplication of publications with organizations outside the United Nations system, as the Inspectors suggest might be possible. In this regard, there is no systematic way to know about forthcoming publications. Also, the question would arise as to who has the authority to propose consolidation and/or elimination of certain publications and give preference to others.

16. The Working Committee of the Publications Board has asked departments to ensure that when additional publications are added to the publications programme they do not duplicate any information currently provided by other agencies and programmes within the system.

Recommendation 2. In order to enhance the role that publications play in implementing the mandates of intergovernmental bodies and, concurrently, to improve the cost-effectiveness of its publishing activities, the Secretary-General should submit the most updated report on publications policy to the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-second session. The General Assembly, in turn, should conduct a detailed assessment of existing publications policies and practices, and may wish to propose any necessary modifications, by taking into account the recommendations presented in this report.

17. The JIU report was not received in sufficient time to allow for the drafting of a new publications policy paper for submission to the General Assembly at its current session. It should be pointed out that an in-depth report of the Secretary-General on publications policy (A/C.5/48/10), prepared under the direction of the Publications Board in consultation with all author departments, was circulated for the Assembly's consideration in October 1993. Although it was, unfortunately, never discussed, it was heavily relied upon by the Inspectors in their current recommendations. Some of the contents of that report are outdated as a result of restructuring within the Organization as well as policy changes made during the past four years. Much of it, however, holds true and remains relevant to any discussion of publications policies. The reports of the Publications Board on its activities in 1995 and 1996 can be considered as updates to the earlier policy paper and can be made available to the General Assembly.

18. The JIU report stresses that publications policy has not been taken up by the General Assembly in recent years. This is regrettable, and a fruitful discussion of publications policies and practices in the Assembly would be

welcomed by author departments and by the Publications Board, particularly in view of a number of new initiatives that have been taken, which will be highlighted below. For example, the many administrative instructions relating to publications in the control and limitation of documentation series are being updated by the Publications Board. New instructions, including one on publishing in an electronic format, are also being produced by the Board. A compendium of these new and revised policy directives is being prepared.

19. The Inspectors ask that the electronic environment in particular be taken into account in the establishment of a solid, coherent and innovative publications policy. As previously stated, this is the goal of the Organization, and great strides have been made in this area by all departments. Publishing in electronic formats and dissemination of United Nations materials on electronic networks has been accorded high priority by the Publications Board. Through its Working Group on Electronic Publishing, set up in 1994, the Board has actively responded to system-wide interest in exploiting new technologies to widen the outreach of the Organization. Details on the Organization's many electronic publishing initiatives are provided below under recommendation 14.

Recommendation 3. The Secretary-General should review the current administrative, managerial and organizational structure of publishing activities and introduce necessary reforms at United Nations Headquarters. These could include the possible consolidation of a number of the existing functions and units into a more centralized structure by taking into account, inter alia, the requirements to streamline and accelerate the publishing process and bring greater integration and coordination.

20. Comments on this recommendation should be read in conjunction with recommendation 10 below.

21. The functions of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, of the Department of Public Information and of the Department of Management in the publishing process do not entail overlap or duplication. The established mechanism for the coordination, scheduling and monitoring of publications includes weekly interdepartmental meetings, which are chaired by the Documents Control Section of the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services. During those meetings, production schedules are agreed on, and monitored and adjusted as necessary. Further improvements in production coordination could be made within the context of those meetings.

22. The production process is subject to ongoing refinements. For example, the Treaty Series Group of the Copy Preparation and Proofreading Section was transferred to the Treaty Section of the Office of Legal Affairs to allow for greater centralization in producing the Treaty Series. This is a model for the type of structural adjustment that can be made to improve efficiency in the publications process. Also, the Production and Coordination Unit has been placed under the direct supervision of a senior manager in the Publications Service of the Department of Public Information, to enhance control in the publications programme.

23. All departments concerned agree that there is room for improvement. In the context of the reform of the Organization, a review of the current administrative, managerial and organizational structure of publishing activities can be carried out, with a view to introducing any necessary reforms, including possibly a more centralized structure. In this context, the proposal made by the Inspectors on establishing a small central unit that would consolidate a number of existing functions/units could be considered. It should be noted that the examples of coordinating efforts on the part of the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the International Labour Organization pointed to by JIU, are interesting and practical, but are not easily translatable to the United Nations Secretariat, a far larger and more diverse entity than those mentioned.

Recommendation 4. The Secretary-General should strengthen the Publications Board by reinforcing its mandates, as well as in terms of its working methods and practices, to ensure that it provides effective overall control, oversight and coordination, in addition to policy guidance.

24. While appreciating the need for policy guidance and oversight within the publications programme of the Secretariat, author departments have reiterated that the purpose of strengthening the Publications Board should be to facilitate rather than control the work. They agree that the suggestion in the report that the Publications Board should screen all publications and even manage the production process is not feasible. The Economic Commission for Europe has characterized increased centralization in general as a recipe for delay and obstruction, particularly in relation to publishing economic surveys.

25. A somewhat broader mandate for the Publications Board was considered in April 1994. It was decided by the Board at that time not to approve it, pending the General Assembly's review of the publications policy report (A/C.5/48/10). It should be pointed out, however, that the proposed new mandate did not in any way suggest the "hands-on" control envisioned by the Inspectors.

26. The Board meets twice a year at the head of department level to discuss and decide on publications policy issues. This composition, with representation at the highest level, went into effect in June 1993. A review of participation in the meetings reveals that the most senior staff members have not, for the most part, been able to attend. If the General Assembly so decides, it might be more workable for the composition to revert to a member from each department, to be designated by the department head.

27. The Working Committee of the Publications Board meets once a month and is composed of representatives from the processing areas - editorial, documents control, distribution, production and coordination, reproduction and design. In addition, representatives from the substantive departments attend when necessary. The Committee is charged with coordinating the planning and supervision of the overall biennial publications programme. In addition to its biennial review of the programme, it discusses a variety of publications-related matters, including additions to the programme, external publishing proposals, requests for reprints, use of external printing funds, electronic initiatives and logo questions.

28. It should be pointed out that, owing to the expansion of electronic publishing, as well as to many other publishing initiatives, the scope of the work of the Publications Board has increased exponentially. To help increase its effectiveness, the Department of Public Information has proposed strengthening the Board's secretariat by appointing a more senior official to work full time as Secretary.

Recommendation 5. Specific mandates to be provided normally in resolutions/decisions of the intergovernmental bodies should be the primary criterion for planning new publications, and publications based on general mandates should be kept to a minimum.

29. It is rare that legislative bodies give specific mandates for publications, as this is seen to be micro-managing the Secretariat. However, in some cases, specific mandates are given for institutional, recurrent publications, such as the United Nations Yearbook. Also, in the case of the Office of Legal Affairs, the General Assembly has given specific mandates for many of its unique and specialized publications, such as the United Nations Juridical Yearbook and the Summaries of Judgments, Advisory Opinions and Orders of the International Court of Justice.

30. General mandates are an important basis for a large number of publications, specifically in the social and economic sector. The need to prepare the majority of those publications is confirmed through the adoption of biennial programme budgets. In addition, some publications are produced in response to urgent concerns of the United Nations community. The opinion has been expressed that limiting publications to those undertaken in response to specific mandates could be a very restrictive measure rather than a pragmatic solution since most resolutions and mandates are of a general nature.

31. While most of its output can be characterized as public information materials rather than publications, it should be mentioned that the Department of Public Information has a general mandate to raise global awareness of the mission, relevance and work of the Organization. This broad mandate is unique, and it enables the Department to respond rapidly and effectively to changing information priorities. In its report, the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities pointed to the multiplicity of the mandates to which the Department of Public Information is already subject as a serious impediment to an effective communications strategy.

32. All author departments have reiterated the importance they attach to retaining a degree of flexibility in their respective publications programmes. In their view, it is essential that they are afforded the latitude to produce a limited number of ad hoc publications which could not have been foreseen at the time of planning the biennial publications programme.



Recommendation 6. All proposed publications programmes should be screened prior to the preparation of each biennial programme budget, first at the departmental level, and then at the Secretariat level (Publications Board).

33. This recommendation is a reflection of current procedure. The instructions for the preparation of biennial programme budgets also include instructions for the completion of forms required by the Publications Board with respect to the proposed publications of each department or office. All departments and entities within the Secretariat have recently undergone a comprehensive review and assessment of their publications in the context of the preparation of the official publications programme for the biennium 1998-1999. All proposed publications have been subjected to careful screening in the department, and were submitted to the Working Committee of the Publications Board for its review. Financial implications were taken fully into account in this process.

34. While the Publications Board can direct and advise, the substantive departments must take the primary responsibility for their output vis-à-vis substance, cost-effectiveness and relevance to mandates. The Working Committee of the Publications Board is responsible for globally administering the funds in the external printing accounts, and therefore, in its biennial review of publications, it looks carefully at proposed contractual spending. It focuses also on the details related to processing of publications, but in no way does it, nor could it, screen the contents of publications.

Recommendation 7. With a view to exercising, above all, a better budgetary control of the United Nations publishing activities, the Secretary-General should institute as part of the programme budget a new system whereby, starting with the biennium 2000-2001, each department receives a separate but consolidated budgetary line covering publishing activities.

35. At present, provision is made for external printing in each budget section where publications are prepared. The production phases, that is, editing, copy preparation, graphic presentation, internal printing, distribution and the like, appear in sections of the budget that are responsible for those functions within the publications process. The activities have been centralized in the name of cost-effectiveness. Unless they are decentralized to each department, it would be difficult to show a separate but consolidated budgetary line covering publishing activities for each budget section.

Recommendation 8. As a rule, no publication should be produced under the United Nations regular budget unless the publication in question is contained in the budgetary provision mentioned in recommendation 7 and is approved by the General Assembly within the framework of the programme budget.

36. This recommendation reflects current operating procedure. The publications programme of the United Nations, as a rule, reflects the publications proposed in the biennial programme budget. However, here again, author departments have reiterated that it is essential to maintain a degree of flexibility in order to permit an effective response to both external developments and the changing needs of the Organization. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs has emphasized that it is important to make allowance for the fact that a research

programme in support of parliamentary deliberations is likely to result in a publication that may not have been forecast during the formulation of the programme budget. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has emphasized that since programme-planning rules allow for adding a limited number of outputs/publications by legislation or at the initiative of departments, rules governing publications should be in the same spirit. Also, it is a requirement that whenever a department or other Secretariat entity proposes to add a publication to its programme in any biennium, prior approval must be given by the Working Committee of the Publications Board.

37. It should be noted here that long-term budgetary planning did not foresee the rapid strides made in - and demands made for - Internet publishing, which has left departments with a lack of resources for electronic publishing.

Recommendation 9. Decisions by substantive legislative bodies requesting new publication(s), subsequent to those approved in the programme budget, should be taken only after the careful review of, among other things, information on the potential for duplication and financial implications, and a time-frame should be incorporated.

38. This recommendation is widely supported by the Secretariat, however its implementation is the responsibility of the Member States. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific reports that it agrees with the concept of applying the "sunset rule", provided of course that the specific publication is no longer a priority issue. The Office of Legal Affairs has noted that some mandates provided by the legislative bodies years ago to meet the needs of a different time may no longer be relevant.

Recommendation 10. Once the publication(s) or publications programme(s) is (are) approved by the General Assembly, the entire publishing process (writing, editing, translation, production and sales/distribution) should be planned in a more coordinated and integrated manner.

39. The comments on this recommendation should be read in conjunction with those related to recommendation 3 above. Enhanced coordination of the processing of publications, from writing to distribution, could help to improve their timeliness and, accordingly, increase their relevance and demand.

40. In pursuing this objective, however, it must be remembered that the proceedings of intergovernmental organs and bodies make it imperative to research, write, edit, translate, print and distribute parliamentary documentation for meetings on specific dates, and almost always within short deadlines. Fulfilling this requirement as efficiently as possible makes it necessary to give higher relative priority to the preparation and processing of documents than of publications, except those that are themselves required for meetings.

41. This practice has led to difficulties in setting reliable dates for the issuance of publications, which can be delayed. Any proposed reorganization of the publications production process, however, must take these facts into account.

42. An interdepartmental Publications Promotion Group, chaired by the Sales and Marketing Section of the Department of Public Information, was formed by the Working Committee of the Publications Board in 1996. The Group's objective is to provide an additional mechanism to help author departments with the planning of their publications. It allows for informal exchanges of information in connection with the budgeting, design and production, and promotion of specific publications before they reach the production stage.

Recommendation 11. As the basis for producing publications in a cost-effective manner as well as the basis for the new budgetary system proposed in recommendation 7, the United Nations Secretariat should develop a cost-accounting system by the end of 1998 in order to have knowledge of the full cost of publications (i.e., direct and, to the extent possible, indirect costs).

43. The Secretariat is currently undertaking a study on the development of a cost-accounting system that would address the question of direct and indirect costs related to publications. Such a system, however, would not necessarily imply that each budget section would reflect the resource requirements for all phases of issuing a publication.

44. The Office of Legal Affairs has stated that, for example, while the cost of typesetting and printing the United Nations Treaty Series is known, the related costs of compiling and processing information are only a matter of conjecture. In its view, an effective system for costing publications in a realistic manner would enable the Organization to determine the most appropriate sale prices.

Recommendation 12. Pending the establishment of a cost-accounting system, an annual planning of the printing workload should be made, current outsourcing practices on publications should be reviewed and a review should be conducted by the Secretariat to provide some flexibility to the use of the external printing account for internal printing purposes, as appropriate.

45. There is wide Secretariat support for making effective and cost-efficient use of internal reproduction facilities for publications. The fact that the Reproduction Section at Headquarters is now able to produce high-quality colour work and bind large volumes with less disruption to the immediate production of parliamentary documentation than in the past are positive developments. However, the shift to increased use of internal printing facilities, as well as the increased in-house electronic processing of publications, have additional cost implications. The Publications Board and author departments strongly support the Joint Inspection Unit's recommendation that more flexibility in the use of the 340 external printing accounts be allowed. Those funds could be used to help defray expenses related to internal printing, such as for overtime, paper and other supplies, and for special processes, including colour proofing. It would be welcomed if the General Assembly supported this recommendation.

46. Advance planning of the printing workload could facilitate increased use of internal printing. However, figures established at the beginning of a biennium remain highly hypothetical, as submission dates for publications frequently

change in the course of two years in accordance with changes in capacity and the absolute need to handle other work.

47. A review of current outsourcing practices on publications could be undertaken, in which a streamlining of procurement practices could be examined.

Recommendation 13. Once a cost-accounting system is established, the question of an appropriate mode of printing - internal or external, mix of the two, partial outsourcing, etc. - should be reviewed/reconsidered first by the Secretariat and a proposal made to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session.

48. The implementation of the recommendation would depend on the institution of a cost-accounting system. As previously stated, given the increased volume and range of publications now being printed internally, the internal option has become a vital means of realizing the Organization's publishing objectives during a period of budgetary constraint. While a thorough review of the cost-effectiveness of internal versus external printing could be useful, experience has suggested that the Organization's varied needs are best met at present through a judicious mix of both printing options. Any such review of printing costs should take into account an assessment of acquiring "print-on-demand" capacity.

Recommendation 14. In view of potential as well as proved advantages of the use of advanced technologies, including electronic publishing, the increased use of such technologies for the publishing process should be enhanced by the Secretariat and a general shift towards the various forms of electronic publishing should be intensified and due regard paid to cost recovery and access to such electronic products in developing countries.

49. The Inspectors acknowledge in their report the impressive strides the Secretariat has made in utilizing new technologies, both in the production process and in the dissemination of information. The proposals made under this recommendation are already acknowledged goals of the Secretariat, as previously stated, and will be pursued by all departments as aggressively as resources permit.

50. The foundation for an "electronic United Nations" was completed on 30 June 1997, by which time every permanent mission in New York was connected to the Internet and offered training, and was able to access the United Nations Web site and documents on the optical disk system. Electronic publishing, in particular the use of the Internet, is capitalizing on the unparalleled name recognition and interest accorded the United Nations and its activities around the world. It is significantly widening access to the materials of the Organization in a cost-effective manner and offers potential for future savings to the Organization. The United Nations has clearly come a long way since launching its Web site on the Internet as a pilot project in June 1995.

51. The Department of Public Information responded to the need for increased coordination by assembling a small section to plan, design, implement and maintain an interesting, time-sensitive and rich information site on the Internet. That section, which receives technical back-up and support from the

Information Technology Services Division of the Department of Management, serves as a focal point for issues and queries relating to electronic information. A centralized United Nations Secretariat Web site, which points to other United Nations Web sites and gophers, has been established by the section, which also continues to help organize data for the Web and structure the information presented. It also monitors posted information for appropriateness and potential duplication, maintains and services the centralized Web site and coordinates training of staff to handle Web site designs and updates.

52. Directives entitled "Guidelines for information providers on contributing information to the UN Home Page" have been prepared. Also, a strategy paper entitled "Internet: the UN and the electronic information future" was produced by an interdepartmental working group at Headquarters and approved by the Publications Board in December 1996. The latter includes an extensive annex on copyright and other intellectual property issues, which was submitted by the Office of Legal Affairs. Both the guidelines and the strategy paper were presented to the Inter-Agency Meeting on Language Arrangements, Documentation and Publications in June 1997.

53. Almost all Secretariat publications are created on electronic systems and pass through many stages of production in electronic (digital) formats. They may then be published as electronic or hard-copy publications. Output in electronic format, however, usually requires conversion or other manipulation of the electronically manufactured version.

54. Cost recovery for electronic products has been advocated by the General Assembly. To this end, subscription services have been developed for the United Nations Treaty Series and the Monthly Bulletin of Statistics on-line, and are being developed for the optical disk system. Member States receive all products free of charge, and tiered pricing is established for developing countries. Recurrent publications are also being produced on CD-ROM and sold.

55. United Nations products developed for the Internet only (no print version) are an innovation in electronic publishing that provide a new variation on the theme of the "publications option". The Department of Public Information's CyberSchoolBus, an award-winning educational service on the United Nations Web server, is a particularly exciting example of this type of product. In a visually stimulating and content-rich environment, it offers real-time projects, weekly quizzes and resources for teachers, students and the public at large.

56. At present, electronic publishing is treated almost universally in the publishing industry as a supplement to print publications, not an alternative. In this connection, it must be remembered that Member States have mandated that print materials should retain their importance for the foreseeable future, since electronic dissemination still reaches only a small part of interested constituents. For this reason, printed publications remain essential as reference material and handouts.

57. While the encouragement of electronic publishing in the JIU report is welcomed, it must at the same time be underscored that this work is at present in the form of an "add-on" within the Secretariat. Publications are first produced in a print version and the provision of electronic versions represents

additional work and resources. In this connection, the Secretariat is working to respond to a General Assembly mandate to digitize older publications, such as the Official Records of the Security Council, for use on CD-ROM or the optical disk system. However, a consequence of the rapid advancements in electronic publishing in the Secretariat is that provision of funds for this important work has been largely left out of the budgetary process.

Recommendation 15. Cooperative arrangements, in particular joint publications between the United Nations Secretariat and other entities, should be promoted by the Secretariat when feasible, with a view to encouraging a single and consolidated publication on identical or similar subjects.

58. Under reforms now being considered, increased cooperation among various bodies of the United Nations system in the substantive areas would enhance the opportunities to work together in a number of areas, including publications.

59. Author departments report that the cooperative arrangements recommended by the Inspectors are being made and are strongly supported. United Nations staff are encouraged to maintain ongoing contacts with their counterparts in the system, with a view to, among other things, developing joint publications. ESCWA has observed that consolidating publications of a similar nature system-wide should be given serious consideration, although various publications addressing similar issues should not always be regarded negatively. Such publications may address the same subjects from different perspectives and may be different in scope. Any consolidation, however, should be done at the planning stage, and to make this feasible ESCWA has suggested beginning the exercise with recurrent publications because they could be identified in advance. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs is of the view that because individual programmes clearly have different focuses and agendas, the recommendation should be understood to mean "when appropriate".

60. Regarding the preparation of interdisciplinary/joint publications with other regional commissions or entities, the Economic Commission for Europe would suggest that three criteria be met: the decision should be taken on a voluntary basis by interested agencies; the objective of the publication should be to provide a variety of views and experiences on specific issues; and the time-frame for publications should be realistic and agreed upon by the organizations involved.

61. This JIU recommendation could be considered in the framework of existing inter-agency coordination arrangements.

Recommendation 16. Sales income reports, indicating total revenues from various sales channels, should be produced and reviewed monthly or at least quarterly by the Secretariat.

62. This recommendation is welcomed, as the provision of timely and accurate sales income statements on a regular basis is urgently required by the Sales and Marketing Section of the Department of Public Information for its efficient functioning. Increased cooperation within the Secretariat, coupled with the technical possibilities facilitated by the Integrated Management Information

System (IMIS), should make possible the regular and timely generation of this necessary information in compliance with the JIU recommendation. The same information is also required with respect to the royalties generated from external publishing projects.

Recommendation 17. With a view to using income generated by the sale of publications in a more rational manner, while at the same time providing incentives for more cost-effective publishing activities, the current treatment of sales income should be reviewed by the Secretariat and a proposal made to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session for consideration of a more flexible treatment of sales income as well as for a related creation of a self-supporting publications fund or account.

63. Sales income is used for marketing, promotion and distribution activities that are carried out by the Sales and Marketing Section on behalf of author departments. Only the net revenue is returned to the General Fund. There is no inconsistency with this JIU recommendation and the current practice of the Organization, the only difference being that such expenditures have not been reflected in individual budget sections.

64. On the other hand, more flexible treatment of sales income is a proposal that has received strong support from author departments and other entities. It was elaborated upon in the previously mentioned 1993 publications policy report (A/C.5/48/10). Departments have expressed the need to receive a portion of the revenues earned by their publications for specific purposes associated with the cost of developing publications. Also, the sales programme is currently limited, since an increase in its net revenues does not necessarily result in a commensurate budgetary increase in the resources required to expand its operation. The recommendation for further study of the possibility of making resources available to author departments for product development, maintenance of databases, start-up costs and other activities to increase sales revenue is a positive one which is welcomed. The matter is under discussion by the Publications Board's Sales Promotion Group and a proposal can be prepared for General Assembly consideration.

65. In this connection, it is worth noting that JIU has stated in its report that within the United Nations system, there are a number of organizations that have a publications fund or account, financed primarily by the revenue generated from the sale of publications.

Recommendation 18. More vigorous and systematic sales promotion should be conducted by the Secretariat with the aim of maximizing financial returns to the United Nations.

66. This recommendation recognizes the importance of the sales and marketing operation, as well as the need for strong promotion of sales publications. Marketing activity is a key function within the sales operation and innovative approaches to selling United Nations publications will continue to be introduced. The wide range of promotional activities currently being utilized include advertisements; book reviews; direct mail campaigns; production of a sales catalogue, also made available on Internet; participation at book fairs, exhibits and UN conferences; electronic marketing; user surveys; and the

"adoption programme" targeting professors and other educators. Author departments are encouraged to collaborate closely in the successful marketing of their publications. It must be stressed, however, that marketing activities are expensive, and therefore the necessary funds to perform this function must be made available.

67. It should be pointed out that the reason for promoting sales of United Nations publications goes beyond the mere commercial purpose of maximizing financial returns for the Organization. Dissemination through sales channels ensures that the unique intellectual output of the United Nations is transmitted throughout the world in a systematic and quantifiable way. Publications sales information can be an important measure of real interest in a publication. This market-based indication of commercial value can be more reliable than a readership survey in determining the value attached by users to various publications. It has been suggested that sales and marketing of publications should be considered as an integral part of the publications process, not as a late "add-on" as is often the case. To this end, efforts to provide this area with greater flexibility to participate, with resources from its revenues, in the preparation of marketable publications, to target markets and market niches and to work out cooperative arrangements with the non-profit and private sectors in publishing should be encouraged.

68. At the same time it must be emphasized that the cost-recovery objective should not dominate the dissemination objective. The Office of Legal Affairs has expressed the view that it is particularly important in the field of international law that information is freely disseminated to institutions and people in the developing world. In the case of the Department of Public Information, for example, free distribution of certain of its materials is crucial to the achievement of its public information mandate.

#### CONCLUSION

69. Several author departments have expressed the view that, although the Joint Inspection Unit's mandate was to conduct a comprehensive survey of the extent to which recurrent publications could be made more cost-effective, the resulting report does not make distinctions between recurrent and non-recurrent publications, newsletters and electronic products.

70. Also, departments have suggested that several additional points relating to the publications process could have been addressed in the report. Since publications shape much of the public's perception of the Organization and are instrumental in making widely available the results of significant substantive work, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is of the view that quality review and assurance should play a major role in any assessment of the Organization's publications programme and policies. On this subject, ESCWA has suggested that part of the budget could be used for paying honoraria for a board of specialized readers to evaluate a number of selected key publications in each organization.

71. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs notes also that the current responsibilities of legislative bodies and Secretariat units in establishing



extensive free distribution lists should be reviewed. In its view, this matter deserves an additional recommendation.

72. Another point that the Inspectors did not raise is the importance of copyright enforcement. Increasingly, United Nations material is being repackaged and sold without authorization, particularly through electronic means. This is a problem that the system must urgently confront. The Publications Board secretariat has prepared a questionnaire for distribution to other agencies and programmes of the system to seek their experiences in this area and perhaps help develop a common response.

73. Oversight and review procedures ensure that modifications are continually being made in this complex process. The report of JIU has provided recommendations on how further improvements can be made. Full consideration of the recommendations could undoubtedly lead to greater effectiveness and efficiencies in the publishing activities of the Organization.

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