

JIU/NOTE/2005/2

Original: ENGLISH

**REVIEW OF THE MANAGEMENT OF THE
UNITED NATIONS LAISSEZ-PASSER**

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United Nations, Geneva 2005

In accordance with Article 11.2 of the JIU Statute, this note has been “finalized after consultation among the Inspectors so as to test the recommendations being made against the collective wisdom of the Unit”.

CONTENTS

	<i>Paragraphs</i>	<i>Page</i>
Acronyms		iv
I. Introduction	1-3	1
II. General remarks	4-6	1
III. Issuance of UNLPs	7-30	2
General information on the issuance of UNLPs	7-9	2
Centralization of the issuance of UNLPs	10-14	3
Database	15	4
Duplicate/multiple issuances of UNLPs	16-19	4
Staff must sign and date UNLPs	20	5
Certifying officers	21-23	5
Information/guidance to new UNLP holders	24-25	6
Guidelines/instructions on the issuance of UNLPs	26-27	6
Memorandum of Understanding	28-29	7
Filing systems	30	7
IV. Renewal of UNLPs	31-32	8
V. Safe keeping and retrieval of UNLPs	33-38	8
Retrieval of UNLPs for safe keeping	33-34	8
Retrieval of UNLPs upon separation of staff	35-36	9
Reporting lost and stolen UNLPs	37-38	9
VI. Audit of administration of UNLPs	39	10

ACRONYMS

CTBTO	Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission of Western Asia
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ILO	International Labour Organization
INTERPOL	International Criminal Police Organization
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
OIOS	United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services
OPCW	Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNLP	United Nations laissez-passer
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
UNU	United Nations University
UNV	United Nations Volunteers
WHO	World Health Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

Objective: To assess the management of United Nations laissez-passer (UNLP) with the view to ensuring effective and consistent policies, procedures and practices regarding issuance, use, safe keeping, renewal and retrieval of these documents.

I. Introduction

1. In 2003 the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) undertook audits on the management and control of the United Nations laissez-passer (UNLP) at the United Nations Headquarters as well as the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna (A/58/364, para.97). In the light of the many concerns raised in the OIOS audits, and the subsequent General Assembly resolution (A/RES/59/270, para. 9), which requested the Secretary-General to “ensure the development of appropriate Organization-wide rules, policies and procedures for managing laissez-passer”, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) decided to undertake this system-wide review of the management of UNLP, as suggested informally by OIOS. This demonstrates how the two oversight bodies exercise complementarity.

2. As a follow-up to the audits previously mentioned, this note focuses specifically on issues related to the management of UNLPs by the United Nations and specialized agencies of the United Nations system; it does not examine historical or political circumstances relating to UNLPs. In preparation of this note the Inspectors conducted interviews with representatives of a number of United Nations system organizations as well as with external organizations, in particular the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL). Additional information was obtained from questionnaires distributed throughout the system.

3. The Inspectors would wish to take this opportunity to express appreciation to those organizations that responded to the questionnaire and to the representatives of the various United Nations organizations and other organizations with whom interviews were held. In particular, the Inspectors would wish to thank the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) for sharing its experience which results from its unique situation.

II. General remarks

4. The UNLP is the official travel document of the organizations of the United Nations system and some others, and is issued to all staff and officials travelling on United Nations related business. It is also used as identification for legitimate entry into the premises of international organizations. Consultants are not entitled to UNLPs, but may be given United Nations certificates when travelling on official business for the organization (ST/AI/1999/7). However, some exceptions do exist. There are two types of UNLPs – red and blue. Red UNLPs are given to senior staff and officials, generally at the level of D2 and above. In exceptional cases red UNLPs may be given to staff below the D2 grade. All other United Nations staff and officials are provided with blue UNLPs.

5. The Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations (1946), the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies (1947) and the Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Atomic Energy Agency (1959)¹ provide the legal basis for the use of UNLPs by the United Nations, the specialized agencies of the United Nations system and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). These Conventions provide that UNLPs should be recognized and accepted as valid travel documents by the authorities of Member States. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the only specialized agency that issues UNLPs in its own right. An administrative agreement concluded between the United Nations Secretary-General and the Director-General of ILO in 1950 granted ILO this special status to issue UNLPs. ILO-issued UNLPs differ slightly in colour from those of the United Nations.

6. Staff and officials of some other organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO) and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) are granted UNLPs based on the relationship agreement between the United Nations and the respective organizations. In some host country agreements, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) have been accorded similar status, privileges and immunities as officials and granted UNLPs.

III. Issuance of UNLPs

General information on the issuance of UNLPs

7. UNLPs are issued at three duty stations: the United Nations Headquarters in New York, the United Nations Office at Geneva and the United Nations Office at Vienna. The task of issuing UNLPs is divided between these three duty stations basically according to geographical regions. United Nations Headquarters processes UNLPs for staff and officials based in New York as well as for those assigned to offices in the western hemisphere, Asia, all peacekeeping missions and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The United Nations Offices in Geneva and Vienna generally process UNLPs for staff and officials assigned to offices in Europe and Africa and the field offices of the United Nations organizations located in Europe and Africa.

8. Despite the effort to establish some logic in the task of issuance of UNLPs based on geographical regions, a number of anomalies have been found in the system. The World Health Organization (WHO), although based in Geneva, is served in terms of UNLP issuance by both Geneva and New York. Additionally, while the World Tourism Organization is based in Madrid, Spain, the UNLPs of its staff and officials are issued in New York. The United Nations University (UNU) processes UNLPs of staff and officials at the Tokyo office of IAEA while Geneva is responsible for issuing UNLPs to staff and officials at UNRWA.

9. According to information received from the three issuing duty stations there are currently more than 70,000 UNLPs in circulation. Exactly how many of these are actually

¹ United Nations Treaty Series, Vol.1, No. 4, p.15; Vol. 33, No. 521, p.261; and Vol. 374, No. 5334, p. 147.

valid is unclear due to the inaccurate database as well as the time lag between the renewal of UNLPs at field duty stations and the recording of that information with the issuing duty stations.

Centralization of the issuance of UNLPs

10. The Inspectors consider that the issuance of UNLPs is too dispersed. The system in this connection must be more centralized allowing only one organization the responsibility to issue UNLPs from one duty station. Having three United Nations issuing duty stations plus ILO results in a risk of inconsistencies in administrative practice and thus increased possibility for abuse or misuse of UNLPs.

11. According to information received from an expert on the security of travel documents at INTERPOL, security risks are more likely with a decentralized system of issuance. It is generally easier to manage a centralized process and ensure controls and follow-up in the event of misuse or a security breach. This is the reason why the international standards applied to the security of national passports, as developed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), recommend a centralized issuance of these documents. The Inspectors are of the view that the issuance of UNLPs by the United Nations should be limited to the United Nations Headquarters in New York, taking into account numbers of staff and the location of duty stations in terms of global deployment of organizations. In this context the delegation of authority currently extended to various duty stations should be withdrawn.

12. It is acknowledged that there are instances when a newly recruited staff member may be required to travel immediately, before the issuance of a UNLP, or when the holder of a recently expired UNLP may be required to travel before a new UNLP is issued. In order to save time in such cases of urgent travel, staff members could use a national passport, and be equipped with an attestation of the organization verifying that the travel is for official purposes, as is practiced by some organizations outside the United Nations system.

13. The department at the United Nations Headquarters responsible for issuing UNLPs should do so in conjunction with the United Nations Department of Safety and Security because of increasing security risks linked, inter alia, to the use of UNLPs as identification to enter United Nations premises.

14. The Inspectors were unable to find out the rationale for creating, or a compelling reason for maintaining, an exception for ILO to issue UNLPs in its own right while all other specialized agencies – based in Geneva or elsewhere – are served by the United Nations. The Inspectors are not convinced that this exception should continue. They are of the view that the United Nations should be the only organization within the system with responsibility for the issuance of UNLPs. Having only one issuing organization facilitates a comprehensive and consistent practice in the management of UNLPs, eliminates duplication within the United Nations system and limits possible security concerns. The Secretary-General may wish to take up the subject with the Director-General of ILO.

Database

15. There is no centralized database that provides accurate updated information on the issuance and renewal of UNLPs within the United Nations system. The three issuing duty stations within the United Nations maintain independent databases with no interface among them. The Inspectors are of the view that there should be a centralized database for UNLPs. A centralized UNLP database would ensure precise updated information, facilitate systematic information sharing, limit multiple issuances and enhance the management, control and monitoring of UNLPs. Such a database should accurately include the current number of valid UNLPs in circulation within the United Nations system.

Recommendation 1:

The Secretary-General should:

- a) centralize the procedures and ensure that issuance of UNLPs by the United Nations is limited only to New York;**
- b) urge the Director-General of ILO to cede the issuance of ILO UNLPs to the United Nations; and**
- c) establish a centralized UNLP database with accurate updated information to enhance the management, control and monitoring of all UNLPs and, as long as ILO continues to issue UNLPs, establish an interface with the United Nations database.**

Duplicate/multiple issuances of UNLPs

16. Officials may generally only hold one UNLP. However, in certain circumstances duplicate and/or multiple UNLPs are issued, particularly to senior officials who travel frequently and do not have sufficient time between missions to obtain the relevant visas with one UNLP. Additionally, duplicate UNLPs are issued to officials who travel to certain States that do not allow entry into their territory if the traveller's UNLP shows visas or markings of certain other States.

17. The Inspectors observed that the form sheet used to request duplicate UNLPs does not require the applicant to state the reasons why he/she is requesting a second, and in some cases third, UNLP. Additionally, insufficient procedures are in place to ensure that officials surrender their duplicate UNLPs upon return from mission or upon expiration.

18. Clear policy and strict criteria must be established to identify the circumstances under which duplicate/multiple UNLPs could be issued and which officials would be so entitled. In this context, efforts must also be made to limit the number of officials who are granted duplicate/multiple UNLPs. The absence of such a clear policy and strict criteria leaves the matter open to the discretion of managers, and could lead to excessive issuances as well as possible misuse of UNLPs and other security risks.

19. The Inspectors recognise that in some cases the issuance of duplicate/multiple UNLPs to one official may be unavoidable, but would wish to emphasize the importance of limiting this practice, especially in the light of possible security concerns. It is noted that

the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) issues only one UNLP per official, including the Director-General. This practice is commendable and should be emulated by other organizations within the system.

Recommendation 2:

The Secretary-General should:

- a) develop strict criteria for the issuance of duplicate UNLPs; and**
- b) amend the form sheet to ensure that the applicant clearly states the reasons for requesting a second or third UNLP.**

The Director-General of ILO should do the same as recommended in a) and b) above, as long as ILO continues to issue UNLPs.

Staff must sign and date UNLPs

20. Most organizations follow the good practice of requesting recipients of UNLPs to confirm receipt of the document by signature. However, the Inspectors note that there have been cases in which staff members registered as UNLP holders subsequently claimed that they never received a UNLP. The practice of having officials sign and date UNLPs must be made mandatory for all issuances, including renewals.

Recommendation 3:

Heads of organizations must ensure that staff members responsible for handing out UNLPs do so only upon the signature and dating of the intended recipient.

Certifying officers

21. In its ‘Audit of Controls over the United Nations Laissez-Passer (UNLP) at Geneva and Vienna’,² OIOS recommended that the number of certifying officers authorized to certify the issuance of UNLPs should be limited to a minimum. For the most part United Nations system organizations follow this practice and generally appoint not more than four to five UNLP certifying officers. Nevertheless, there are some organizations that retain either too many or too few certifying officers.

22. UNLP certifying officers are usually based in the human resources departments or the travel or protocol units and may be at various levels (including General Service and Professional staff) within the organizations. There is a need for consistency between the organizations in this regard. In the light of the fact that human resource departments are usually best informed about the status of staff, officials and others working in United Nations organizations, they are best placed to certify the issuance of UNLPs.

² OIOS Audit No. AE2002/105/1.

23. Heads of organizations may wish to review the numbers and levels of certifying officers as well as the departments in which they currently function to ensure adequate monitoring and control of UNLPs.

Information/guidance to new UNLP holders

24. Some UNLPs contain information on how the document should be handled by the holder. In particular, this information outlines the obligations to be met by the UNLP holder in case of loss or theft of the document and in the event of separation from the organization. Additionally, the information provides instructions on requests for renewal and replacement of UNLPs. Several organizations indicated that the information distributed in this context is based on the instruction entitled 'Important notice to holders of United Nations laissez-passer'. The Inspectors observed that the practice of including information on the use of UNLPs directly in the document is not uniformly implemented throughout the system. Further, sufficient efforts are not made to ensure that all officials are informed of their obligations upon receiving their UNLPs.

25. The Inspectors are of the view that all UNLP holders should be informed about the use of the document and the obligations that they assume as holders. All United Nations officials should be given the same information regarding the use of UNLPs. That information should be updated and systematically inserted into all UNLPs.

Recommendation 4:

The Secretary-General should take steps to ensure that information regarding the use of UNLPs and the obligations of UNLP holders is updated and included in all UNLPs.

The Director-General of ILO should do the same as long as ILO continues to issue UNLPs.

Guidelines/ instructions on the issuance of UNLPs

26. There are no updated guidelines or instructions that clearly establish the rules, policies and procedures relating to the issuance of UNLPs. While some organizations indicate that they consider the United Nations document entitled 'Guide to the issuance of United Nations travel documents' (PAH/INF.78/2), dated 1 June 1978, as the official guideline on the administration of UNLPs, a number of other organizations are not aware of these guidelines and/or do not have a copy on file.

27. In response to the concerns expressed by OIOS in its audit of controls over UNLPs regarding this issue, the Office of Central Support Services indicated that the guide mentioned in paragraph 26 serves as the equivalent of an administrative issuance. Even if this is the case, there is clearly a need to review and update these guidelines to reflect current security situations and other realities, such as the recent developments in the design and issuance of passports by some Member States.

Memorandum of understanding

28. Article VIII, Section 26 of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies (1947) provides that “Officials of the specialized agencies shall be entitled to use the United Nations laissez-passer in conformity with administrative arrangements to be concluded between the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the competent authorities of the specialized agencies, to which agencies special powers to issue laissez-passer may be delegated.”³ The United Nations has advised that these arrangements and agreements (including those covering related organizations) are concluded as a matter of routine and are regarded as purely technical or practical in nature. They are not identical as each organization has different requirements and different reporting structures. It should be noted that the World Tourism Organization recently became a specialized agency, and that a memorandum of understanding has not yet been finalised with the United Nations. Furthermore, it should be noted that responses to the JIU questionnaire indicate a lack of knowledge of officials of some organizations about a specific agreement or arrangement between their agency and the United Nations regarding the use of UNLPs.

29. In the light of the significant number of UNLPs in circulation,⁴ and current international concerns regarding possible misuse of travel documents, it is important that the United Nations conclude memoranda of understanding with all United Nations organizations concerning the core elements of administration of UNLPs. Existing memoranda should be revised and where necessary renegotiated to ensure efficiency in the management of these processes. These revised and updated memoranda should complement the more detailed guidelines referred to in paragraphs 24 and 25 of this note.

Recommendation 5:

The Secretary-General should conclude and/or update agreements/memoranda of understanding with all organizations whose officials use UNLPs with a view to updating core elements of the administration of UNLPs and encouraging enhanced efficiency in this regard.

Filing systems

30. A few specialized agencies have established in-house electronic filing systems for the administration of UNLPs while others maintain a manual system that does not easily facilitate updating and information sharing. Organizations are encouraged to consider adopting an updated electronic filing system on UNLPs that includes request for issuance of UNLPs as well as information on renewals, retrievals and lost and stolen UNLPs.

³ A similar provision is included in Article IX, Section 28, of the Agreement on the Privileges and Immunities of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

⁴ United Nations Headquarters – 38,920 UNLPs in circulation; United Nations Office at Geneva – 20,138 UNLPs in circulation; and United Nations Office at Vienna – 12,007 UNLPs in circulation (as at November 2004).

IV. Renewal of UNLPs

31. Currently, red UNLPs must be renewed at one of the three issuing duty stations. Blue UNLPs, however, may be renewed at a field duty station. At field level, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or the Resident Coordinator is normally authorized to renew UNLPs. Given the significant numbers of United Nations field operations, there are concerns regarding the many and dispersed number of duty stations authorized to renew UNLPs and the apparent ease with which UNLPs are renewed. Because there is currently no centralized database on renewals it is difficult to keep track of how many valid UNLPs are in circulation. Efforts should be made to limit the number of renewal duty stations and ensure that renewal forms processed at field level are submitted to headquarters for immediate inclusion in the database.

32. Generally, it is the responsibility of each staff member to keep track of the expiry date of his/her UNLP and to request a renewal as and when needed. However, the Inspectors would wish to commend the practice of the Economic Commission of Western Asia (ESCWA) in reminding each staff member when his/her UNLP is about to expire and to request that the document be submitted for renewal.

V. Safe keeping and retrieval of UNLPs

Retrieval of UNLPs for safe keeping

33. The Inspectors considered whether staff should be requested to return their UNLPs to their respective administration offices at the end of each mission for safe keeping and to prevent misuse such as use for private travel purposes. The guide to the issuance of United Nations travel documents, referred to in paragraph 26, provides that “Laissez-Passers should always be returned to the responsible administrative officer for safe-keeping when not required for official travel”. However, most organizations allow their officials to keep their UNLPs between missions and have indicated that once a UNLP is issued the matter of its safe keeping becomes the responsibility of the holder. This practice generally does not apply to General Service staff. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is the only United Nations organization which reported that it requests all officials to return their UNLPs after each mission.

34. In the light of information received from INTERPOL indicating that most travel documents are lost or stolen during travel rather than while the holder is at home, it would appear that the practice of giving staff the responsibility for safe keeping does not present any major additional risk in terms of loss or theft of UNLPs. Further, to request the return of all UNLPs after official travel would result in an enormous administrative workload for the secretariat responsible for managing this. It would also pose a challenge with respect to officials who may need to travel at short notice and/or outside of regular working hours. Moreover, given that many organizations indicated that there were usually only a few lost or stolen UNLPs reported per year, the administrative cost and effort involved in storing all UNLPs between missions outweighs what is to be gained.

Retrieval of UNLPs upon separation of staff

35. United Nations officials are required to return their UNLPs for cancellation upon separation from the organization in which they were employed. This includes staff members who are resigning or retiring. To ensure the return of UNLPs, many organizations typically withhold a certain amount of money or percentage of the staff member's final salary until the travel document is retrieved. The amount withheld varies between organizations. The Inspectors applaud the practice of withholding a portion of a separating staff member's salary until the UNLP is returned and suggest that the practice be systematically applied by all organizations within the system. The amount withheld should be substantive enough (e.g., 50 per cent of one month's salary) to encourage the return of the UNLPs. Those who transfer without a break in service would not need to return their UNLPs; however, the database would need to be updated to reflect the change.

36. Some organizations eventually return the cancelled UNLPs to the original holders, who may have requested them as souvenirs upon retirement or separation from the organization.

Recommendation 6:

Heads of organizations should:

- a) **discontinue the safe keeping of UNLPs by the organizations; and**
- b) **employ the practice of withholding at least 50 per cent of one month's salary of separating staff members until the UNLP is returned for cancellation.**

Reporting lost and stolen UNLPs

37. In the event that a UNLP is lost or stolen, the person to whom the UNLP was issued must report the matter to the local police authorities and submit a copy of the police report to the administration of his/her respective organization. This is required in order for a replacement UNLP to be issued. Most organizations have indicated that once a police report is submitted, no further action is taken by the administration regarding the lost or stolen UNLP. According to information received, INTERPOL is not systematically provided with details of lost and stolen UNLPs, which is the practice in the case of lost or stolen national passports of a certain number of Member States. The Inspectors are of the view that INTERPOL should be informed of lost and stolen UNLPs and permitted to pass the information on to the immigration authorities of Member States, to prevent possible abuse of these travel documents.

38. Member States that have issued visas in UNLPs that are now reported lost or stolen are generally not informed of the loss or theft. The Inspectors are of the view that this practice should be introduced, especially in cases where the visa is still valid, to limit possible misuse and security risks within the territories of Member States.

Recommendation 7:

The Secretary-General should:

- a) **request heads of organizations to inform the United Nations of all cases of lost or stolen UNLPs;**
- b) **inform INTERPOL of these matters accordingly; and**
- c) **inform the relevant Member States that have issued visas in UNLPs that are now reported lost or stolen, especially when the visas are still valid.**

The Director-General of ILO should do the same as recommended in b) and c) above, as long as ILO continues to issue UNLPs.

VI. Audit of administration of UNLPs

39. The ‘Audit of Controls over the United Nations Laissez-Passer (UNLP) at Geneva and Vienna’, undertaken by OIOS, is the only internal audit of this subject matter undertaken within the system within the past ten years. In the light of concerns relating to the administration of UNLPs raised in the OIOS report and additional weaknesses revealed in this note, the Inspectors suggest that internal audit offices of all United Nations system organizations should undertake periodic internal audits on the administration of UNLPs. The larger organizations may wish to conduct free-standing audits and the smaller ones may do so in the context of a broader audit on, for example, travel. The need for an internal audit is particularly important in those organizations where a significant number of cases of lost or stolen UNLPs has occurred.

Recommendation 8:

Heads of organizations may advise their internal audit units to undertake an audit on the administration of UNLPs within the next budget period.