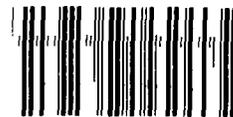


GAO

June 1986

UNITED NATIONS

More Can Be Done to Strengthen the U.N. Joint Inspection Unit



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United States
General Accounting Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and International Affairs Division

B-222687

June 17, 1986

The Honorable George P. Shultz
The Secretary of State

Dear Mr. Secretary:

This report discusses the effectiveness of the U.N. Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in its role as an independent evaluation unit. It suggests steps the Department of State can take to strengthen the JIU.

We initiated this review because of continuing congressional interest in improving the economy and efficiency of the U.N. system and the Department of State's interest in strengthening the JIU.

The report contains recommendations to you on pages 36 and 42. As you know, 31 U.S.C. §720 requires the head of a federal agency to submit a written statement on actions taken on our recommendations to the Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs and the House Committee on Government Operations not later than 60 days after the date of the report and to the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations with the Agency's first request for appropriations made more than 60 days after the date of the report. We would appreciate receiving copies of your statement to the committees.

We are sending copies of the report to the Chairmen of the four above committees, interested House and Senate authorization committees, and the Director, Office of Management and Budget.

Sincerely yours,

Frank C. Conahan
Director

Executive Summary

Purpose

The United States has long sought to strengthen the United Nation's evaluation capabilities so that member nations can be assured that economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of U.N. programs and activities are maintained. The U.N. Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) was established as the only independent U.N. body with broad authority throughout the U.N. system to perform investigations and evaluations and to make its findings and recommendations publicly available to member nations.

Because of continuing congressional interest in improving the economy and efficiency of U.N. system program management and State Department interest in strengthening the JIU, GAO objectives were to

- determine whether the JIU is functioning as intended and is fulfilling the evaluation role envisioned by Congress;
- assess Department of State actions to monitor JIU activities and improve the Unit's effectiveness; and
- identify ways to enhance the Unit's effectiveness.

Background

Established on a temporary basis to conduct investigations bearing on the efficiency of U.N. system services and the proper use of funds, the JIU became a permanent organization in 1978 with the added responsibility of evaluating most U.N. system activities. The Unit was expanded from 8 to 11 inspectors and was provided additional resources to carry out its new evaluation role.

From January 1, 1978, to December 31, 1984, the Unit issued 87 reports addressed to legislative bodies and executive heads of U.N. system organizations.

Results in Brief

JIU's effectiveness is limited by several factors. While some of its reports have been useful, the Unit's credibility has been harmed by uneven report quality. JIU does not systematically follow up on its report recommendations. In addition, the responsibility of U.N. system agencies for addressing JIU reports is unclear and fragmented. Consequently, the agencies have tended to set aside reports without taking specific action.

JIU has played a major role in calling attention to the need for evaluation in the United Nations and influencing design and development of U.N. internal evaluation systems. JIU's external evaluation role, however, has been much less than envisioned when its statutory authority was granted in 1978.

While the Department of State shares the concerns GAO raises, it has placed little emphasis on encouraging JIU to adopt procedures that could improve the quality of review and reporting. Instead, it has focused on getting increased attention to JIU reports and establishing a more orderly review process. GAO believes State can do more to encourage efforts designed to enhance JIU's effectiveness without impairing the Unit's independence

Principal Findings

Uneven Report Quality

From analyzing 25 reports issued during 1983 and 1984, GAO concluded that 19, or 76 percent, did not fully satisfy standards that State has identified as necessary for quality assurance (See pp 14-16)

Review and Reporting Standards

Discussions with JIU inspectors disclosed that the Unit has only limited written review and reporting standards and procedures. U.N. system officials believe that more detailed guidance would benefit the inspectors. (See pp. 18-20.)

Qualifications of Inspectors

Since the Unit's inception, the United States and other members have regarded inspectors' qualifications as an important factor influencing the quality of the Unit's work. However, appointed inspectors continue to lack experience in the inspection and evaluation fields. For example, only 4 of the current 11 inspectors have served on a national supervision or inspection body. (See pp. 17 and 18.)

Recommendations Not Acted on

U.N. system officials cite inadequately supported and vague recommendations as reasons that many are not implemented. A follow-up review of 6 of the 25 reports noted above showed that only one of 51 recommendations included in the 6 reports had been implemented. (See pp. 12 and 13.)

JIU and U.S. officials contend that well-researched reports containing sound recommendations have been set aside without substantive action. GAO found examples of this as well as long delays in responding (See pp. 25 and 26.)

Work Program Needed

Member nations and participating organizations have expressed concerns about the subject and focus of JIU reports. GAO found that the Unit does not develop a multi-year work program to identify high-priority issues and ensure systematic coverage of U.N. system activities. (See pp. 21-23.)

Few Evaluations Conducted

The Unit does not have a clear plan or strategy for its evaluation efforts, even though its budget allocates 40 percent to evaluations. Since 1980, the Unit has not conducted any evaluations, i.e., studies designed to determine the relevance, effectiveness, and impact of activities in light of their objectives. (See pp. 39 and 41.)

State Department Efforts

The Department of State has supported the JIU since its inception and is committed to further strengthening its influence. However, State has been reluctant to encourage JIU to adopt procedures which GAO believes could improve JIU reports and strengthen their impact. Specifically, State has not proposed measures to establish a multi-year work program, develop comprehensive standards, or establish a recommendation follow-up system. (See pp. 30 and 32.)

Recommendations

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State identify short and long-term strategies for strengthening the JIU. As a minimum first step the Secretary should instruct U.S. representatives to engender support to require JIU to

- provide the appropriate committee of the General Assembly with a multi-year work program,
- provide the appropriate committee of the General Assembly with the Unit's annual work plans prior to implementation,
- develop and implement comprehensive written guidelines for conducting inspections and evaluations and drafting reports, and
- establish a formal recommendation follow-up system and expand JIU's annual report to include sections on follow-up and Unit accomplishments.

Further, to ensure that the JIU places adequate emphasis on evaluation, GAO recommends that U.S. representatives seek support for U.N. efforts to require JIU to

- devote more of the Unit's resources to evaluation,

-
- identify evaluation efforts in its annual work plans, and
 - document its evaluation activities in its annual report.

Agency Comments

The Department of State agrees with the thrust of GAO's conclusions and recommendations and said it will take action to carry them out. Emphasizing that the JIU is the only independent external evaluation unit in the U.N. system, State said any actions to improve its effectiveness and credibility have the full support of the Department. State also agreed to seek the development of a medium-term work plan for the Unit, to be updated annually; the development and publicizing of comprehensive written standards for conducting inspections and evaluations; and the establishment of a formal recommendation follow-up system. In addition, State supports more Unit work on evaluation, including program results evaluation.

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Abbreviations

ACABQ	Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions
DIESA	Department of International Economic and Social Affairs
DTCD	Department of Technical Co-operation for Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
GAO	General Accounting Office
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
ILO	International Labor Organization
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

Introduction

U.N. organizations' program budgets have grown significantly over the past decade, resulting in large increases in U.S. assessed and voluntary contributions. As the U.N. system's largest contributor, the United States will provide about \$1 billion to U.N. system organizations in fiscal year 1986. In response to congressional pressure to curb budget growth, the United States, with the support of its Western allies, has emphasized a policy of zero net budget growth. It has also long sought to strengthen and improve the U.N. system's evaluation capabilities with the hope that the evaluations will lead to greater economy and efficiency.

Due in large measure to U.S. efforts, the United Nations has taken a number of actions since the late 1960's to improve its external and internal auditing and evaluation. One such action was the establishment on a temporary basis of a Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in 1967 in Geneva, Switzerland, to conduct inquiries and investigations on all matters bearing on the efficiency of U.N. system services and the proper use of funds. Following a review of its work by U.N. system governing boards and secretariats in the mid-1970's, the Unit became a permanent organization in 1978, with a new statute that expanded its mandate to include external evaluation of U.N. system programs and activities. As described in its statute, the Unit is to "provide an independent view through inspection and evaluation aimed at improving management and methods and at achieving greater coordination between organizations." For evaluation, the statute authorizes the Unit to

- assist intergovernmental bodies in the external evaluation of programs and activities;
- advise participating organizations on methods for internal evaluations and periodically assess the organizations' progress in this area; and
- perform ad hoc evaluations of programs and activities.

The Unit may make recommendations to U.N. organizations based on its inspections and evaluations but may not enforce their implementation or interfere with the organizations' operations. The Unit communicates its findings by way of reports, notes, and confidential letters. From its inception through December 31, 1984, the Unit has issued 87 reports addressed to legislative bodies and executive heads and 9 notes addressed to executive heads only.

With the enactment of its new statute, the JIU became a subsidiary body of the U.N. General Assembly and of many specialized agencies rather than being attached to the Secretary General. Except for the International Fund for Agricultural Development, the World Bank Group, and

the International Monetary Fund, all U.N. specialized agencies have accepted the statute and contribute to JIU's funding.

The General Assembly became responsible for appointing inspectors in accordance with statutory provisions designed to promote equitable geographic distribution and reasonable rotation among countries. The statute requires that inspectors be chosen from members of national supervision or inspection bodies or from persons of a similar competence on the basis of their special experience in national or international administrative and financial matters. Inspectors serve for 5 years, renewable for one further term. Each year the inspectors elect a chairman—who coordinates the work program and represents the Unit in its formal communications—and a vice-chairman.

JIU's Role in Evaluation

To permit the Unit to effectively perform the evaluation duties set forth in its statute, the General Assembly increased the Unit from 8 to 11 inspectors and authorized it to hire additional professional and general service staff members. The Unit's 1978-79 budget request noted that the new staff would be needed to help collect, analyze, and organize large amounts of data and help inspectors establish evaluation methodologies. Accordingly, JIU expenditures rose from about \$1.9 million for 1976-77 to about \$3.8 million for 1978-79. Since that time, the budget has remained at about \$4.2 million.

U.S. Support for U.N. System Evaluation

In 1973, at our suggestion, the Congress amended section 301(e) of the Foreign Assistance Act (22 U.S.C. 2221) to require the President to seek the creation of an independent review and evaluation group to the United Nations.

In 1975 and 1976, when U.N. working groups and committees were discussing proposals to improve the U.N.'s external evaluation capability, U.S. delegates contended that the U.N.'s external evaluation mechanism ideally should be composed of professional economists, management analysts, auditors, and other specialists. In the interest of obtaining broad support, however, they agreed to work out an arrangement whereby, rather than establishing a new evaluation body, the JIU would assume responsibility for external evaluation and would designate two to three inspectors to specialize in evaluation. The General Assembly then established the JIU on a permanent basis and expanded its size and mandate.

State views the JIU as an indispensable part of the U.N. system and regards it as the independent evaluation unit that the Congress sought to have established by its 1973 amendment. In statements before both congressional committees and U.N. governing bodies, State has supported JIU's work and indicated its commitment to further strengthening JIU.

The 1973 Foreign Assistance Act amendment also required the Comptroller General to prepare auditing and reporting standards to assist the U.N. review and evaluation group sought by Congress, periodically review reports and related information from the group, and make recommendations as necessary to the Congress and the President. In 1975, the Comptroller General provided the United Nations with suggested standards for consideration by governing bodies in formulating terms of reference for an independent review body;¹ however, they were never adopted. In 1980, we issued a report containing recommendations for improving the management and coordination of U.N. system inspections and evaluation² and identifying several ways in which the JIU could enhance its effectiveness. These were not adopted.

In addition to promoting external evaluation, the United States has also encouraged U.N. system organizations to expand and develop internal evaluation systems. To help achieve this goal, the United States supported a series of General Assembly resolutions adopted during 1981-84 that directed U.N. organizations to establish or further improve internal evaluation systems. We plan to issue a separate report addressing U.N. agencies' progress and problems in implementing these resolutions.

Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

We reviewed the JIU because of continuing congressional interest in improving the economy and efficiency of U.N. system program management and Department of State interest in strengthening the Unit. Our objectives were to

- determine whether the JIU is functioning as intended and fulfilling the evaluation role envisioned by Congress,
- assess Department of State actions to monitor JIU activities and improve its effectiveness, and
- identify ways of enhancing the JIU's effectiveness.

¹Statement of Auditing and Reporting Standards for the United Nations (ID-75-60, Apr 22, 1975)

²Improving the Management and Coordination of Reviews, Inspections and Evaluations in the U.N. System (ID-81-11, Nov 19, 1980)

We reviewed records and talked with personnel from the Department of State Bureau of International Organization Affairs and the U.S. Missions to the United Nations in Geneva, New York, and Vienna between July and October 1985.

To assess the JIU's effectiveness, we reviewed U.N. documents from the mid-1970's to the present and compared member nations' and U.N. system organizations' expectations of the JIU with their views on what it has actually accomplished. We analyzed JIU reports issued in 1983 and 1984 and determined whether they contained clear objectives, well-supported conclusions, and specific action-oriented recommendations. We also reviewed U.S. position papers and U.N. Secretariat and governing body comments on these reports to determine how they were received and to identify actions taken to implement recommendations. Finally, we held discussions with eight JIU inspectors and the executive secretary; representatives of the Australian, British, and West German missions to the United Nations in Geneva; officials of the U.N. Secretariat in New York; and the following U.N. system organizations.

- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- International Labor Organization (ILO).
- International Trade Center.
- U.N. Conference on Trade and Development.
- High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).
- Industrial Development Organization.
- Relief Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East.
- World Health Organization.

To assess State Department efforts to monitor and strengthen the JIU, we documented Department procedures for analyzing JIU reports and efforts to support the Unit's recommendations at U.N. governing body meetings. We also reviewed the Bureau of International Organization Affairs' policy priorities and action programs and U.S. proposals introduced at recent General Assembly sessions.

We made our review in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. However, because the JIU and other U.N. system organizations visited are outside our audit authority, our review of U.N. documents was limited to those that are generally available to member governments.

JIU's Effectiveness Can Be Enhanced

The overall effectiveness of the Joint Inspection Unit is difficult to measure because neither the inspectors nor any U.N. body has attempted to document its accomplishments. Although some Unit reports have been useful, many have generated considerable criticism, thereby harming the Unit's credibility and increasing U.N. officials' reluctance to implement recommendations. Our analyses of reports and discussions with report users indicate that the Unit's effectiveness is limited by several internal problems, including

- uneven quality of reports, which can be attributed to inspectors' varying qualifications and the Unit's lack of comprehensive written review and reporting standards;
- lack of a multi-year work program that provides for systematic coverage of programs and issues considered important by governing bodies and participating organizations; and
- absence of a systematic procedure for following up on the status of report recommendations.

We recognize that the criticism originating from the agencies that JIU reviews must be accepted with some degree of temperance. In this regard it is evident that in addition to the internal problems, governing bodies' tendency to set aside reports without substantive action also contributes to the Unit's lack of effectiveness.

Limited Implementation of JIU Recommendations

JIU's effectiveness ultimately depends on the extent to which its recommendations lead to improved U.N. system operations; however, it has no follow-up system for determining whether actions are actually taken to implement report recommendations and no comprehensive study has been made to determine the extent to which recommendations have been implemented. Moreover, no attempt has been made by the JIU, the United Nations, or the Department of State to ascertain measurable improvements attributable to the JIU's work.

We reviewed official U.N. documents relating to JIU reports issued in 1983 and 1984, including minutes of governing body meetings, executive head formal comments, and Secretary General reports on the status of recommendations and could not identify whether U.N. system organizations had acted to implement JIU recommendations. In many cases, these officials agreed with the recommendations and stated they would implement them to the extent possible. In other cases, they disagreed with the recommendations or implied that management was already aware of the

problems and had taken necessary action prior to the time JIU began its study.

Our review and follow-up on 6 of 25 of the 1983 and 1984 JIU reports involving the ILO, IAEA, U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, and U.N. Relief Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East show that of the 51 recommendations in these reports, only one had been implemented. Officials believed that the other 50 recommendations were too vague or were not adequately supported.

According to many U.N. officials, Unit recommendations are often set aside without substantive action. For example, the Secretary of the Fifth Committee¹ stated that the General Assembly often simply takes note of JIU reports rather than recommending that U.N. organizations take specific action.

Although it supports the JIU's work, the Department of State has also expressed concerns that the JIU is not as effective as it could be; for example, in March 1985, a U.S. paper circulated to the Geneva Group—an informal association of Western-oriented developed nations which are the major contributors to the U.N. specialized agencies' budgets— noted that far too often JIU reports containing precise proposals for institutional reform or management improvements are set aside by governing bodies with the single comment that the report has been noted. State officials also believe that U.N. agencies' willingness to cooperate with inspectors and to implement JIU recommendations has been poor, due in part to the governing bodies' tendency to pay little attention to the JIU's reports.

JIU Report Quality Uneven

The tendency to set aside JIU's recommendations may be due to the uneven quality of its reports. Although the JIU has issued some useful products, our analysis supports concerns by member nations and participating organizations that many reports reflect insufficient research and contain vague recommendations. From our discussions with U.N. and U.S. officials and our analysis of the reports, we believe that inspectors' varying capabilities and backgrounds and the lack of comprehensive written standards are two major reasons for the uneven quality of the reports. Efforts by member nations and inspectors to address these

¹The General Assembly's Fifth Committee deals with administrative and budgetary issues and thus relates to the work of all other main U.N. committees. Before the General Assembly can vote on any resolution having financial implications, it must receive information from the Fifth Committee regarding the impact the resolution may have on the budget.

problems could considerably improve report quality and increase the incentive to act on them.

Quality Problems With Reports

Our analysis of 1983 and 1984 reports showed that 19 of 25, or 76 percent, did not satisfy standards set several years ago that the Department of State implied could be used as quality measures for JIU work. In a 1972 letter to the U.N. Secretary General, State contended that the quality of the JIU's work would depend on the degree to which its reports (1) clearly describe purpose, scope, and objectives, (2) support conclusions by objective evaluation of all pertinent facts, and (3) contain action-oriented and specific recommendations.²

For the 25 reports we reviewed, 6 satisfied all three of these standards, 16 only met one or two, and 3 did not meet any. Instead of a clear statement of objectives, several reports contained historical program background not directly related to the problems discussed. Moreover, 10 did not include enough evidence to convince readers of the validity of their conclusions. Finally, 10 reports contained recommendations without specifying actions that should be taken; for example:

- "Each library...should continually consider possibilities and actions needed to keep pace with changing information and library technology requirements."
- "The International Community should react more positively to calls by the U.N. General Assembly and the Governing Council of UNDP (U.N. Development Program) to ensure that adequate resources are available for programs supported by the UNDP and the UNFPA, (U.N. Fund for Population Activities) and that this should be maintained under constant review."
- "The Director General should take a fresh look at the arrangements for collaboration devised in 1978 and ensure its implementation."

In addition, some of the recommendations were long and complex, thereby increasing the difficulty of achieving consensus on what action to take.

Our analysis of reports is consistent with many member nations' and participating organizations' view that the JIU needs to improve its

²These characteristics or standards closely conform to the standards suggested to the JIU by the Comptroller General in 1975 (See p 10)

overall report quality. Although some JIU reports dealing with systemwide management issues have received praise, U.N. participants have frequently criticized the reports as

- addressing broad, complex issues in a superficial manner;
- lacking enough supporting evidence to convince readers that conclusions and recommendations are valid and should be implemented;
- containing vague and general recommendations that leave the reader uncertain about what specific changes are needed; and
- reflecting insufficient consultation and cooperation with officials of agencies inspected.

This criticism has harmed the Unit's overall credibility and increased its difficulty in convincing governing bodies and executive heads to devote sufficient attention to reports.

U.N. officials cited four of the six 1983 and 1984 reports for which we did detailed follow-up as having very limited value and identified weaknesses in all six. Their criticisms focused primarily on the lack of in-depth analysis and support for recommendations. For example:

- The 1984 report on the ILO's Social Security Program reflected inspectors' lack of expertise and thorough understanding of the issues, and the report quality does not justify the resources spent to prepare it. The United States did not support this report because it lacked supporting evidence for a number of assertions.
- The 1984 report on ILO recruitment practices was narrowly focused, politically motivated, and inadequately supported. ILO's employers group, which participates in its governing board, considered the report biased and incomplete and suggested that ILO withdraw its acceptance of JIU's statute. Although the report attempted to address problems associated with policy implementation, the U.S. representative to ILO's governing board agreed that the report was critically flawed and therefore could not serve as a basis for a sound recruitment policy.
- The 1984 report on IAEA's technical cooperation program reflected a lack of research and contained no useful suggestions for improving the program's efficiency or effectiveness. The report was not particularly harmful or controversial but had little value.
- The 1984 report on UNHCR activities in Southeast Asia was relatively honest and constructive but did not reflect a comprehensive understanding of the agency's problems and lacked specific, concrete proposals for improving operations.

U.N. officials we interviewed generally considered the quality of JIU's research to be a problem, although they assessed its magnitude differently. For example, one agency spokesman characterized only 25 percent of the Unit's work as poor. Officials from another agency, however, questioned whether the majority of JIU products are worth the average \$200,000 they cost.

Our review of official U.N. documents concerning 1983 and 1984 JIU reports shows that lack of coordination and cooperation between inspectors and agency officials appears to be another reason why agency officials disagree with many of the report findings. Agency officials responsible for programs reviewed asserted that inspectors did not adequately consult with them for 6 of the 25 reports issued during this period.

For example, the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) Director-General stated that the inspector deliberately avoided FAO officials in conducting the study on World Food Program personnel problems, and as a result, the report's conclusions were invalid. UNDP's administrator wrote to the JIU chairman that the report on UNDP's Office of Project Execution reflected a lack of professionalism and serious misuse of UNDP documents and statistics and was replete with biased quotations and judgments. The major cause of these problems, according to the administrator's letter, is that inspectors did not give the appropriate UNDP senior officials any opportunity for substantive discussion.

Inspectors' Qualifications Vary

U.N. officials, JIU inspectors, and representatives of member nations we interviewed generally believe that inspectors' varying experience and training is a major reason for the uneven quality of JIU reports. As we reported in 1980, JIU currently consists of more inspectors with diplomatic experience than those in the management audit, financial management, or evaluation fields required by JIU's work. The JIU would be stronger if member nations placed greater emphasis on recruiting persons familiar with inspection and evaluation functions.

Procedures for Appointing Inspectors

The JIU statute establishes both inspector qualification requirements and appointment procedures, stating that:

"The Unit shall consist of not more than eleven Inspectors, chosen from among members of national supervision or inspection bodies, or from persons of a similar

competence on the basis of their special experience in national or international administrative and financial matters, including management questions "

In selecting inspectors, the President of the General Assembly must consult with member states to compile a list of countries to propose candidates with due regard for equitable geographic distribution and reasonable country rotation. The President then reviews proposed candidates' qualifications with the President of the Economic and Social Council and the Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and submits a list of candidates to the General Assembly for appointment.

Efforts to Strengthen Qualifications

Since inception of the JIU in 1968, the United States and other members have regarded qualifications as an important factor influencing the quality of the JIU's work. In 1976, the United States cautioned that, above all else, inspectors must possess the highest possible degree of competency and integrity to ensure that they perform their duties objectively and professionally.

In 1980, we reported that the majority of inspectors' experience was in the diplomatic service or in their countries' education departments and that only one had served on a national inspection or supervision body. Because of the length of time needed for new inspectors to become familiar with inspection and evaluation methodology, we concluded that the U.N. system would benefit if greater consideration was given to appointing inspectors with work experience more similar to the work of the Unit.

In 1983, the JIU also recognized a need to address the qualifications issue and forwarded a paper to the U.N. Secretary General that elaborated in greater detail than the statute the functions and desirable qualifications of inspectors and recommended a timetable for filling inspector vacancies. According to one inspector, the proposal arose out of inspectors' belief that the Unit would be stronger if more inspectors had training and experience in management, finance, and evaluation. According to a Department of State official, the United States received a copy of the JIU proposal, and he presumed other members did also. However, it was not formally endorsed or adopted by any U.N. governing body and appears to have received little publicity.

Despite this effort to focus members' attention on the need to recruit inspectors with more specialized experience, the Unit's composition has

not changed much since our last report. Only 4 of the current 11 inspectors have served on a national supervision or inspection body—two came from government finance offices and two from government audit offices. Even those with audit experience have no training or experience in evaluation. The remaining 7 inspectors have served primarily as diplomats.

Many U.N. officials and foreign government representatives we interviewed agree that inspectors should have experience in fields more closely related to the Unit's work but do not know how the United Nations can accomplish this. According to some U.N. officials, member nations do not always nominate qualified candidates and statutory review procedures do not work effectively in the U.N.'s highly politicized environment. U.N. officials informed us that General Assembly delegates are reluctant to closely scrutinize or oppose other regional groups' candidates for fear that they would receive reciprocal treatment.

Comprehensive Review and Reporting Standards Could Assist JIU Inspectors

The JIU has only limited written review and reporting standards, a factor which has contributed to the uneven quality of Unit reports. Inspectors use varying approaches and procedures, which have led many U.N. system participants to perceive a need for more thorough research and consistent methods. Comprehensive standards would help the Unit to produce more consistent quality reports and assist new inspectors, particularly those whose experience and training differ considerably from the Unit's work, to more quickly become familiar with their duties.

Existing Standards Are Limited

The JIU statute embodies some standards for conducting inspections, such as requiring that inspectors

- discharge their duties independently and in the sole interest of the organizations;
- draw up, over their own signature, reports that state their findings and propose solutions to the problems noted;
- finalize reports after consulting with other inspectors to test recommendations against the Unit's collective wisdom; and
- include a summary of their main conclusions and recommendations in reports.

The statute also requires the JIU to determine other standards and procedures for conducting inquiries and investigations. In response to this requirement, the JIU has developed an internal document that briefly elaborates on many of the statute's articles and a written compilation of decisions reached by inspectors at semiannual meetings held through June 1984. JIU officials told us that the Unit also has many customary practices that inspectors generally follow but have not written down

JIU's existing written guidelines do not contain comprehensive standards and procedures for ensuring that reports are accurate, well-supported, and consistent. For example, they do not identify what approaches and methodologies inspectors should follow in gathering and analyzing data sufficient to make supportable conclusions. Specifically, they do not address

- the types of information that inspectors should obtain during an assignment's preliminary phase;
- criteria for selecting sites to be visited;
- techniques and standards for interviewing agency officials and administering questionnaires;
- evidence standards to be used in formulating conclusions;
- procedures for verifying the accuracy of data used in reports; and
- data analysis techniques.

Instead, inspectors rely on judgment and customary practice in determining methodologies and approaches for obtaining and analyzing data and drafting reports.

Since the early 1970's, participating organizations and member nations have emphasized the Unit's need for comprehensive standards. For example, during debates in 1972 on changing JIU's statute, FAO officials asserted that a uniform methodology would help to eliminate one of the Unit's major weaknesses— inspectors' tendency to operate independently instead of as a unit. Many U.N. system organizations still hold this view. For example, officials of four organizations we visited cited problems with inspectors' varying methodologies which have adversely affected the quality of the Unit's work. Officials of two of these organizations believe inspectors should be required to develop more detailed standards.

We have also recognized the Unit's need for comprehensive review and reporting standards in prior reports and testimony. In 1975, the Comptroller General provided the United Nations with suggested review and

reporting standards, some of which are embodied in JIU's statute and internal documents. However, in 1980 we reported that the Unit had still not adopted comprehensive standards and concluded that inspectors would benefit from more detailed guidance.

JIU Terminated Effort to Develop Standards

In 1983, inspectors attempted to develop detailed written standards for conducting studies but terminated the effort shortly after it started because they could not reach agreement. The project was part of a self-assessment effort to improve efficiency and effectiveness. According to its 1984-85 budget, the Unit still intended to formulate guidelines for preparing reports based on an assessment of its past work. Unit officials said such guidelines would be particularly helpful to newly appointed inspectors. According to Unit officials, those involved in the project developed a series of chapters containing guidelines on evidence, methodological models, and other topics not addressed by JIU's existing standards. Again, however, agreement on how to apply these guidelines could not be reached.

The majority of inspectors we interviewed believe the existing written standards are sufficient because customary procedures are well established and the Unit is small enough so that all inspectors are aware of them. Moreover, some believe more rigorous procedures would adversely interfere with their independence.

Unit Lacks a Systematic Work Planning Process

Member nations and participating organizations have also expressed concerns about the subject and focus of JIU reports and asserted that the Unit has not been responsive to high-priority issues. We believe this has occurred largely because the Unit does not follow a systematic procedure for determining what topics should be reviewed and governing bodies have little opportunity to review work plans prior to implementation. Changes to JIU's work planning procedures should, in our opinion, encourage governing bodies to pay more attention to reports.

Types of Reports Issued

Between 1978 and 1984, the JIU issued a total of 87 reports. Governing bodies and participating organizations' requests initiated 23 of these studies, or about 26 percent, while inspectors initiated the remaining 64 studies. The General Assembly initiated 9 of the 23 requested studies, while the specialized agencies—which fund a major portion of the Unit's budget—initiated only 2. The rest were requested by semi-autonomous bodies, such as the UNDP and U.N. Children's Fund (UNICEF) and

U.N. committees and interagency bodies, such as the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the Committee for Programme and Coordination. Of the 87 reports, 53 or about 61 percent concerned only one U.N. system organization, whereas the remainder dealt with cross-organizational issues.

When classified according to subject matter, JIU reports have most frequently addressed personnel matters and organization and management issues, as summarized in table 2.1.

Table 2.1: JIU Reports by Major Subject
1978-1984

Subject	Number
Organization and management	18
Personnel	14
Promoting internal evaluation	9
U.N. restructuring	5
Use of experts and consultants	4
Cultural and natural heritage	4
Program and budget	4
Technical cooperation activities	4
Miscellaneous	25
Total	87

As discussed in chapter 4, the majority of these reports reflect the results of inspections. The Unit has conducted few program evaluations.

Work Programs Should Reflect High-Priority Issues

Many member nations, including the United States, and U.N. system organizations have been critical of JIU's selection of work topics and believe it should take action to ensure that future work programs include issues of high priority to the U.N. system. Specifically, many believe the Unit should conduct more systemwide management studies and economy and efficiency reviews. For example, in 1983, a U.S. delegate to the Fifth Committee encouraged the Unit to direct its resources to studies having more cross-organizational significance and potential to produce action-oriented recommendations. A year later, a Soviet delegate criticized the Unit for spending too much time on issues of limited importance and on topics that executive heads are capable of addressing.

Our analysis shows that only 11 of JIU's 87 reports, or about 13 percent, can be considered to primarily represent economy and efficiency

reviews. Moreover, only 10 of the 153 recommendations in the 25 reports issued in 1983 and 1984 identify potential cost savings. In contrast, 21 recommendations, or about 14 percent, advocate changes that would require increased funding. For example, 6 of the 7 recommendations in the 1983 report on regional programs for African wildlife conservation and management recommend increased spending.

Systematic Resource Allocation Needed

The JIU has not been fully responsive to member nations' priorities largely because of the autonomy exercised by inspectors in selecting review topics and the lack of opportunity for governing bodies to formally review the work program on a timely basis. The Unit could be more responsive and cost effective if inspectors established a longer term planning process aimed at providing systematic coverage of areas most important and relevant to member nations.

JIU's statute requires the Unit to develop an annual work program taking into account requests from governing bodies and suggestions from participating organizations and bodies concerned with budgetary control, investigation, coordination, and evaluation. By custom, JIU inspectors meet in January to develop annual work plans. Prior to this meeting, the chairman requests participating organization heads to submit job proposals. The executive secretary then develops a list of suggested studies; groups them in substantive categories, such as technical cooperation and personnel; and ranks them in order of importance. To ensure a balanced work program, the Unit's internal procedures suggest that inspectors include some evaluation and systemwide studies and at least one subject of interest to participating organizations. The Unit does not currently develop a multi-year work program designed to ensure systematic coverage of U.N. system activities over a longer period.

Although Unit guidelines emphasize collegial decisionmaking, inspectors exercise considerable autonomy in deciding on topics for review. Four inspectors told us that the work programs reflect a compendium of topics appealing to individual inspectors' interests rather than a summary of issues judged to be most important to governing bodies and participating organizations. Although inspectors meet jointly to develop the programs, they do not interfere in each other's selection of topics, according to one Unit official.

Limited Governing Body Oversight

Under the current work planning system, member nations have no formal opportunity to comment on JIU's work programs prior to implementation. JIU's statute requires the Unit to send its work programs to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)³ and to the Secretary General for transmission to participating organizations and U.N. bodies but does not require any governing body to review or approve them. By the time member nations receive the work program and meet at the next General Assembly, most studies are either well underway or have been completed. For example, JIU prepared and began work on its 1985 work program in January 1985, about one month after the 39th General Assembly adjourned. When the 40th General Assembly convened in September 1985, the Unit had already finalized reports on several topics.

In an effort to improve JIU responsiveness, the General Assembly adopted a resolution in 1984 that requested the Unit to (1) concentrate, to the greatest extent possible, on those areas of greatest importance and relevance within the U.N. system and (2) include the basis for selection of each study in annual reports to the General Assembly. However, this resolution does not appear to have increased member nations' influence over JIU's work program. JIU's 1985 annual report commented on some of the studies conducted in 1985 but was not published until August 1985, 7 months after JIU began work on the program. Moreover, the comments or rationale provided gave only a brief and general explanation of why some of the studies were selected.

In the early 1970's, the United States recommended that the JIU be required to develop a time-phased work plan to provide full coverage of U.N. system organizations over a reasonable period of time and that the plan be provided to the ACABQ prior to implementation. The Comptroller General reaffirmed this need in 1975. More than a decade after these suggestions were made, they are still valid and could improve JIU's effectiveness.

Recommendation Follow-Up Is Limited

Currently, inspectors do not routinely verify whether organizations have implemented recommendations, even those approved by governing bodies. Moreover, member nations do not get comprehensive reports showing actions the agencies have taken. Routine follow-up by the Unit

³The ACABQ is a so-called "expert" committee whose members serve in their personal capacities rather than as government representatives. As such, the committee will provide suggestions and recommendations to the Fifth Committee on administrative and budgetary issues

and reporting to the General Assembly would provide agencies with greater incentive to implement JIU recommendations and member nations with a better measure of the Unit's effectiveness

JIU's statute requires executive heads to implement recommendations approved by governing bodies but does not require the JIU to verify actions taken. It does, however, give inspectors the option to determine compliance. JIU has instituted limited procedures for monitoring reactions to its reports but has no system for verifying which recommendations have actually been implemented. JIU's executive secretary keeps a file on each issued report, containing comments prepared by executive heads and resolutions approved by governing bodies. Inspectors sometimes make follow-up visits and occasionally issue follow-up reports. However, this does not occur frequently due to the Unit's small size and rotation among inspectors. Once an inspector leaves the Unit, it is unlikely that other inspectors will follow up on his work

In 1983, JIU inspectors pledged to establish a comprehensive annual follow-up system once governing bodies began taking more decisive action on reports. However, according to one inspector, the Unit has not followed through with this promise because governing bodies have not noticeably improved their disposition of reports. Some inspectors cited limited resources as another factor.

Governing Bodies Would Benefit From More Information

Information received by governing bodies on the status of JIU recommendations is incomplete and often difficult to interpret. The Unit's annual report and the Secretary General's annual report on the status of JIU recommendations are the two primary documents they receive. Neither of these documents—although they contain some useful information—are as comprehensive and useful as they could be.

JIU's annual report, required by statute, includes one or two page abstracts of reports issued during the year and a brief description of other Unit activities. In 1980, we stated that this report could be expanded to show the status of JIU recommendations, so that governing bodies could identify and focus on actions that were planned but never taken. It would also serve to publicize the Unit's accomplishments and provide member nations with a better measure of the Unit's effectiveness.

Since 1972, the General Assembly has also required the Secretary General to submit an annual report identifying major JIU recommendations

that have not been implemented and explaining the reasons why. This requirement was eased in 1977 so that now the report only addresses reports of major General Assembly interest and excludes those addressed to specialized agencies. During a 1982 Fifth Committee meeting, one delegation expressed a concern that member nations could not form any clear idea of the real state of affairs from these reports because they are so general. State Department officials also told us that it was difficult to determine the status of JIU recommendations. U.N. Secretariat officials also said that JIU recommendations are not sacrosanct and may not be acted on.

JIU inspectors we spoke to generally believe they should follow up more on reports; however, they cited problems in establishing a formal comprehensive verification system. They believe the lack of institutional follow-up has limited the Unit's effectiveness. Several inspectors said a follow-up system would encourage organizations to take more action and enable the Unit to identify and report its accomplishments. However, documenting changes attributable to the Unit's work would be time-consuming and difficult, especially for reports addressed to more than one organization.

Procedures for Considering JIU Reports Need Strengthening

Although uneven report quality and lack of comprehensive internal procedures are the primary causes of JIU's limited credibility and effectiveness, U.N. governing bodies' ad hoc procedures for deliberating on reports and their short sessions are also important factors. Both the Department of State and the JIU have asserted that well-researched reports containing sound recommendations have often been dismissed without substantive action. They contend that governing bodies' busy schedules have often precluded action on JIU reports, regardless of their quality. Systematic procedures for referring reports to appropriate governing bodies and ensuring discussion of the issues they contain can enhance the Unit's effectiveness—provided they are preceded or accompanied by efforts to improve the Unit's internal procedures and overall report quality.

Procedures for Deliberating on Reports

JIU's statute requires the executive heads of concerned U.N. organizations to act on JIU reports and sets forth guidelines and procedures to follow in responding to the reports. It also sets time frames within which responses are to be provided. Other U.N. directives also emphasize that all JIU report recommendations are to be considered. For

example, the U.N. Secretary General is directed to report to the General Assembly the action he intends to take on report recommendations.

Responsibility for addressing JIU reports is fragmented among many General Assembly subsidiary bodies, including the Fifth Committee, ACABQ, Committee on Program Coordination, Economic and Social Council, and specialized agency governing bodies. The JIU statute requires the Unit to transmit final reports to the executive heads of all concerned organizations and the ACABQ, and to indicate which U N governing bodies would be most interested in the reports. The Secretary General and other executive heads are responsible for distributing Unit reports, along with their comments, to governing bodies, usually within 3 to 6 months depending on the number of agencies involved. When a report concerns more than one organization, executive heads are supposed to coordinate their responses. They are also responsible for implementing recommendations approved by governing bodies and notifying the JIU of governing body decisions on its reports.

According to the Department of State, JIU reports often do not receive the consideration they deserve due to the United Nation's complicated governing structure. In some cases, reports have not been considered by the appropriate General Assembly subsidiary committees.

The General Assembly's short session is another reason why governing bodies often defer consideration of reports or dispose of them without meaningful action. According to State officials, politically urgent and sensitive issues often preclude the General Assembly from holding extensive discussions on reports during its 3-month session. Moreover, timing is a problem. Governing bodies sometimes do not reach decisions on reports until 2 or 3 years after they are issued. The JIU attempts to issue reports and transmit them to member nations before the General Assembly convenes in September. However, executive heads often do not provide comments until several months later, so governing bodies must defer consideration until the following year. An executive head must comment within 3 months on reports involving a single organization. For reports concerning more than one organization, executive heads must provide their joint comments within 6 months. Agency heads met this requirement for only 52 percent of the 25 JIU reports issued in 1983 and 1984.

Efforts to Improve Deliberation Process

The United States has repeatedly attempted to persuade governing bodies to assign higher priority to JIU reports. For example, in May 1984, the United States prompted the Committee on Program Coordination to adopt a resolution stating that it would conduct specialized reviews of JIU reports before they go to the General Assembly. In response to U.S. initiatives, the General Assembly adopted a resolution in 1984 requesting the Secretary General to ensure that JIU reports are regularly provided to appropriate General Assembly subsidiary bodies for review. In 1985 the United States recommended that the General Assembly begin scheduling separate debates on all JIU reports to ensure that member nations have an opportunity to present their views.

The JIU has also expressed concerns about the limited actions taken on its reports and has suggested ways of improving the review process. In its 1983 annual report, the Unit noted that specific action is not taken on many reports because the General Assembly's main committees do not consider them in an orderly manner. The Unit proposed a standard format for governing bodies' use that would identify which recommendations they approved, noted, and disagreed with. Although the General Assembly did not formally adopt JIU's suggested format, it commended it to the attention of U.N. bodies in both 1983 and 1984 and passed a resolution in 1984 reminding U.N. legislative bodies of the need for specific, clear decisions.

Despite these attempts to institute a more structured process, it appears that continuing efforts will be needed to convince governing bodies to devote sufficient attention to JIU's work. For example, although the Committee on Program Coordination resolved to devote more attention to JIU reports in 1984, all but two of six reports scheduled for discussion at its June 1985 meeting were deferred due to limited time.

Conclusions

The JIU has broad investigative powers; however, its effectiveness ultimately depends on agencies' willingness to adopt and implement its suggestions and recommendations. It is therefore critical that member nations and U.N. system agencies view JIU products as being objective and useful.

However, widespread criticism of JIU reports and procedures demonstrates that the Unit has a serious credibility problem. Moreover, governing bodies tend to set aside JIU reports without taking specific action.

The Department of State has often noted that governing bodies lack adequate procedures for addressing JIU reports, which often accounts for the lack of responsiveness. The United Nations could benefit from a more timely and systematic procedure for ensuring that reports are referred to and discussed by appropriate governing bodies; however, JIU first needs to address internal problems having a bearing on the quality of its reports. These include the need to develop

- comprehensive written standards to help improve report quality,
- a multi-year work program to help ensure that important programs and issues are covered over time, and
- a systematic procedure for following up on the status of report recommendations.

Some JIU inspectors said that they believe the Unit's existing written standards are sufficient because the Unit is small and customary procedures are well established and well known by all inspectors. They further believe that more rigid, formal standards will hamper the inspectors' independence.

We disagree with these views. Using generally accepted auditing or evaluation standards is a necessary step towards objectivity and quality control. Standards to ensure greater consultation and cooperation between agency officials and inspectors are also needed so that agencies view JIU reports as fair and objective and are more willing to implement recommendations. Standards should also be particularly helpful to inspectors with little or no prior experience in conducting inspections and evaluations.

While we recognize that the United States cannot expect the JIU to adopt a single member nation's standards, the Unit should further consider the Comptroller General's standards. It also may wish to review standards used by other member nations' external review and inspection bodies, recognizing that some may not be applicable to a multilateral organization.

Procedures for developing a multi-year work program that provides balanced coverage of U.N. programs over time should also help to enhance the Unit's reputation. Providing this program and the Unit's annual plans to U.N. governing bodies prior to implementation should help to improve the Unit's responsiveness to important issues and increase member nations' interest in reports.

The matter of inspector's qualifications deserves more emphasis and attention. The JIU has recognized this and its statute clearly stresses the importance of selecting candidates competent in inspection and management areas. Greater attention to this matter by nominating parties and selection officials could help to improve the JIU's credibility and the quality of its reports.

Finally, the Unit should establish a recommendation follow-up system. Although doing this may require resource reallocation, it would provide governing bodies with more information on what has happened to JIU recommendations and could lead them to pay greater attention to Unit reports. Moreover, agencies would be more likely to implement recommendations if they expected the JIU to follow up the recommendations and report results to governing bodies. The Unit's small size is a factor that must be considered in developing such a system. For this reason, the Unit may wish to select a few of its reports each year for verification and state the results in annual reports. Or it could require organizations to complete annual follow-up questionnaires and verify a sample of responses.

Actions to address the needs discussed above must be initiated by the Department of State. Thus, our recommendations pertaining to the improvements needed in the JIU are directed at the Department's efforts discussed in chapters 3 and 4.

The Department of State Should Intensify Its Efforts to Improve JIU's Effectiveness

The Department of State is committed to further strengthening the JIU's influence throughout the U.N. system. However, although the Department shares other U.N. system participants' concerns about the uneven quality of JIU reports, it has placed little emphasis on encouraging the Unit to adopt procedures that could improve report consistency and cause more recommendations to be implemented. Instead, it has focused largely on increasing governing bodies' attention to JIU reports and establishing a more orderly review process.

The Department needs an overall strategy that includes proposals to increase the Unit's accountability to U.N. governing bodies and to impose greater consistency and discipline on inspectors' procedures for planning and conducting inspections and evaluations. Such a strategy should specify short and long-term actions for enhancing the Unit's stature and reputation and address ways of building support for U.S. proposals among other member nations

The Department's Role in Supporting JIU's Work

The Bureau of International Organization Affairs within the Department of State has overall responsibility for establishing policy for U.S. participation in the United Nations and the JIU. Periodically, the Bureau identifies major priorities and develops action programs for implementing them. Within the Bureau, the Office of U.N. System Coordination conducts most of the actual work connected with the JIU. This office receives all JIU reports, prepares position papers on those affecting the United Nations as a whole, and refers the remainder to other bureaus or government agencies having substantive responsibility for the issues addressed.

The Bureau works with U.S. Missions to the United Nations in New York, Geneva, Rome, and Vienna in implementing U.S. policy on JIU matters. Each year, it provides the Mission in New York with guidance on points U.S. delegates should seek to include in the General Assembly's annual resolution on the JIU and the U.S. annual statement on the Unit. U.S. Missions in other locations have a somewhat different and more limited role in JIU matters. For example, U.S. Mission officials in Geneva stated they spend very little time on JIU issues. Mainly, the Mission implements guidance received from Washington and periodically reports on Unit activities.

In 1984, the Bureau established its policy priorities and renewed its commitment to strengthening the JIU. One of the Bureau's six current priorities is to improve U.N. evaluation mechanisms and to assess U.N.

field programs. In May 1985, the Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs reported to Congress that the Bureau intends to achieve this objective, in part, by working to strengthen the JIU's influence throughout the U.N. system.

U.S. efforts to strengthen the Unit have focused on establishing a more systematic and comprehensive review process for JIU reports. U.S. statements before the Fifth Committee and others have emphasized the Unit's contributions and stressed the need for governing bodies to address JIU reports in a more orderly manner. For example, in a November 1984 statement to the Fifth Committee, the U.S. delegate stated that JIU reports were not receiving adequate consideration and suggested new procedures for subsidiary body review. In November 1985, the United States expressed continuing concern about this problem and recommended further ways for ensuring more comprehensive review.

Although the United States shares other member nations' and U.N. organizations' concerns about report quality, U.S. delegates to the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies have not proposed any recent measures to encourage the Unit to

- establish a multi-year work program that could be provided to the General Assembly prior to implementation;
- develop comprehensive standards for conducting reviews and drafting reports; and
- establish a recommendation follow-up system that would encourage organizations to take recommended actions.

Department of State officials believe their most important task is to persuade governing bodies to become more interested in the JIU's work. To this end, they have begun a campaign to promote more concerted action on JIU reports by Geneva Group members.

In March 1985, the United States circulated a position paper to Geneva Group members to stimulate suggestions for making the JIU function more effectively. The paper was scheduled to be discussed at the Group's September 1985 meeting, but was deferred until the spring 1986 meeting to allow members more time to prepare responses. U.S. officials see the Geneva Group as helping to assure that JIU reports receive a more prominent place on governing boards' agendas. However, due to the Group's primary focus on budgetary matters and limited staff

resources, U.S. officials and other Geneva Group member representatives we spoke to stated it can play only a limited role in addressing other Unit problems.

U.S. officials are reluctant to interfere in JIU's internal operations because its statute guarantees inspectors' independence and the United States prefers to leave the Unit as unfettered as possible. More specifically, they believe the Unit's authority to decide what to review and how to conduct studies is critical to its effectiveness as the United Nation's only independent review and evaluation group.

Department of State officials also stated that potential opposition by developing member nations is another reason why they have not proposed major reforms designed to enhance the Unit's effectiveness. Although the United States is the United Nation's largest contributor, its vote counts no more than any other due to the U.N.'s one-member, one-vote rule. According to several U.S. officials, the Group of 77—a majority U.N. coalition composed of developing nations—has not been very supportive of developed nations' efforts to expand and improve the U.N.'s evaluation capabilities. U.S. officials and representatives from other Western governments we interviewed said their governments are reluctant to propose major reforms, especially those involving statutory changes, because the developing nation majority could counter with proposals aimed at reducing the Unit's authority and influence.

Options for Enhancing the JIU's Effectiveness

We believe the Department of State needs a more aggressive strategy for strengthening the JIU. U.S. efforts to persuade other member nations and participating organizations to pay more attention to JIU reports will not produce significant results unless accompanied by internal changes aimed at improving report quality. Member nations could significantly strengthen the Unit's performance within the current statute by exercising more oversight through the General Assembly and its subsidiary organs. Should such efforts not prove successful, however, other alternatives, including statutory changes, should be pursued.

More Governing Body Oversight Needed

Although independent of the U.N. secretariat, the JIU is accountable to the General Assembly and the legislative organs of specialized agencies that have accepted its statute. However, governing body oversight is limited and narrowly focused.

For example, although the JIU's statute requires it to develop standards for conducting inspections and evaluations, no U.N. governing body has ever requested the Unit to expand or provide copies of its standards. This has occurred despite the fact that many member nations and participating organizations have expressed concerns about the Unit's methodology. According to State officials, the United States has never initiated such a request because the Unit considers its standards confidential; such a request would be reasonable, however, since the Unit is accountable to governing bodies and its statute requires standards. Moreover, other U.N. evaluation and audit organizations have made their standards available to member nations.

The General Assembly's Fifth Committee reviews JIU's overall activities annually. This Committee considers JIU's annual reports and the Secretary General's reports on recommendations, but rarely examines them in detail or uses them to question the Unit about its plans and accomplishments. As noted previously, the Unit's 1983 annual report stated that inspectors had undertaken internal studies designed to improve the Unit's efficiency and effectiveness. Although they pledged to assess past activities, develop standards for preparing reports, and introduce techniques for recommendation follow-up, inspectors terminated the project without any changes to Unit procedures. Neither the Fifth Committee nor any other U.N. governing body has asked the Unit to provide the results of this study or to explain why the effort was terminated prematurely.

Budgetary review is another area where member nations could exercise greater oversight of JIU activities. Although JIU's budget submission provides a narrative explanation of plans for allocating resources among evaluations and inspections, governing bodies involved in budgetary review have not asked for documentation on how the resources were actually spent and rarely spend much time questioning the budget, according to U.S. officials. For example, the Committee on Program Coordination did not review the JIU's 1986-87 budget due to time constraints. Moreover, the ACABQ approved it without changes or discussion. We believe governing bodies should consider using the budget review process as a forum for reviewing JIU's plans and accomplishments.

In December 1985, the General Assembly passed a resolution introduced by the United States which contains several sections aimed at increasing the attention that governing bodies afford JIU reports. The resolution also includes an amendment requesting the Unit to evaluate its activities and report to the General Assembly at its 1987 session. The United

States should use this opportunity to encourage changes in JIU's planning process, inspection procedures, and recommendation follow-up.

The General Assembly also called for establishment of a group of inter-governmental experts to identify ways to improve U.N. administrative and financial functions. Evaluation and inspection measures, including JIU functions, have been suggested or proposed for group study. This also represents opportunity for the United States, through its group representation, to press for action on the proposed measures pertaining to the JIU.

Statutory Reform

Statutory change to the Unit's composition and mandate is another alternative that the United States must weigh as a long-term strategy for strengthening the JIU. Statutory reforms could address problems that are political in nature and therefore difficult to address administratively. However, attempting statutory change carries a risk of other changes being made that would lead to further deterioration in the quality, objectivity, and professionalism of the Unit.

U.N. officials have proposed various ideas for modifying the JIU's mandate and composition through statutory amendment or overhaul. For example, during a 1975 debate on JIU's conversion to permanent status, one special study group recommended that member nations consider establishing a unit composed of various professional specialists and headed by a single individual who would direct the work of other staff members. Reports would then be issued under the collective authority of the JIU rather than by individual inspectors. After serving two terms, one recently retired inspector we interviewed believes that replacing inspectors with a hierarchical unit composed of international career civil servants is the only way to significantly enhance the quality of the Unit's products. In his opinion, inspectors' lack of specialized training and experience in fields such as auditing, finance, and management is the JIU's most serious problem and one that can only be dealt with through major restructuring. Other U.N. officials we interviewed believe member nations should retain the Unit's current structure but revise the statute to more precisely define inspector qualification requirements and change the appointment procedure.

In a 1979 report,¹ and again in 1980, we proposed that the U.N. Board of Auditors be expanded and that an auditor general position be established. The expanded Board would help to coordinate JIU work and increase the exposure of JIU findings and the consideration of JIU recommendations. The auditor general position would give the Board the ability to coordinate JIU work and reports as well as all other U.N. system review and evaluation groups. This proposal was considered but never implemented.

We believe the Department of State should assess various alternatives for major changes in the Unit's structure in the event that current strategies do not result in anticipated improvements.

Conclusions

The JIU's effectiveness is limited by internal problems, including uneven report quality and lack of emphasis on high-priority issues. U.N. governing bodies' oversight of JIU's activities has been limited. Because inspectors' limited efforts to address internal problems have not been very effective, we believe governing bodies need to provide more guidance on how to improve the overall quality and relevance of JIU reports.

Department of State efforts have focused on persuading member nations to pay more attention to Unit products. While we recognize that these actions are needed because quality reports are sometimes set aside without meaningful action, they should be accompanied by aggressive efforts to encourage the Unit to adopt more consistent and effective procedures for conducting its work.

The Department of State, working with other member nations through U.N. governing bodies, could persuade the Unit to make significant changes in its procedures without amending its statute. Long-term planning, improved standards for conducting inspections and evaluations, and more follow-up should significantly improve report quality and provide governing bodies and U.N. organizations with more incentive to implement recommendations. However, in the event that this approach does not work, the Department should be prepared to pursue other alternatives. For example, re-examination of the auditor general concept, or some variation thereof, may, once again, be warranted. Accordingly, the Department should analyze and assess other options for strengthening the U.N. system's external evaluation capability, such as

¹Improving Financial Management in the United Nations by Strengthening Audits and Evaluations (ID-79-56, Sept. 24, 1979)

major JIU restructuring. In assessing other approaches, the United States must give serious consideration to other member nations' potential reactions and possibilities for building support.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Secretary of State establish a comprehensive strategy for strengthening the JIU that identifies short and long-term approaches for enhancing the quality of Unit reports. As a first step toward strengthening the Unit, we recommend that the Secretary instruct U.S. representatives to work with other member nations to increase General Assembly guidance and oversight and to propose changes in Unit procedures, including requiring JIU to take the following actions.

- Provide the General Assembly with (1) a multi-year medium-term work program that shows how JIU will allocate its resources among U.N. activities and issues over a specified time period and (2) the JIU annual work plan prior to implementation.
- Develop and implement comprehensive written guidelines for conducting inspections and evaluations and for drafting reports.
- Establish a formal recommendation follow-up system and expand JIU's annual report to include sections on follow-up and Unit accomplishments.

In addition, we recommend that the Secretary direct his representatives to closely review the JIU's budget request and use the U.N. budget review process to question and hold the Unit more accountable.

In the event of JIU restructuring, the Department should seek to take the lead to develop ways to strengthen the inspector selection process and place more emphasis on the nomination and selection of candidates competent in inspection and evaluation skills.

Agency Comments

The Department of State agrees with the thrust of our conclusions and recommendations and said it will initiate action to carry them out. Specifically, State said it supports the development of a Unit medium-term plan, to be updated annually, the development of comprehensive written standards, and the establishment of a formal recommendation follow-up system. State said it will continue to monitor JIU performance through the budget process.

Evaluation Mandate Remains Unfulfilled

The JIU has yet to fulfill that part of its mandate pertaining to the conduct of results-oriented evaluations of U.N. system program activities. Instead, it has devoted most effort programmed for evaluation to promoting the development and use of U.N. system organizations' internal evaluation systems. This effort has been commendable, but it leaves a significant void in the amount of effort the Unit can devote to doing results-oriented program evaluations. Because the JIU is the only U.N. organization with authority to conduct results-oriented studies which are available to all member nations, it should be doing more to fulfill this responsibility.

External Evaluation Is Needed to Complement Internal Evaluation Efforts

Internal evaluation units have evaluation responsibilities for their organizations, but the JIU is the only organization authorized to conduct evaluations across the U.N. system. For example, the U.N. Board of Auditors' authority is limited to organizations that are part of the U.N. proper, and its audits concentrate largely on financial questions rather than on program effectiveness. The Board, however, is moving more to management and efficiency reviews.

Moreover, most U.N. system organizations' internal evaluation systems emphasize self-evaluation; i.e., managers evaluate the programs they administer. Organizations rely on this method primarily because it is inexpensive and permits broader coverage than would be possible if central evaluation units, which generally consist of only three or four professionals, were required to conduct evaluations. A major weakness of this approach, however, is the lack of objectivity that can occur when managers assess their own performance. Also, organizations rarely provide member nations with self-evaluation results but use this form of evaluation as an internal management tool only. External evaluation is therefore needed to complement organizations' self-evaluation efforts and to provide member nations with information needed to make decisions on resource levels.

JIU Efforts to Promote Evaluation

To its credit, the JIU has helped focus more attention on the need for evaluation and has influenced U.N. system organizations to establish and expand internal evaluation systems through its reports, sponsored meetings, and informal contacts. Most officials with whom we spoke, including several evaluation unit chiefs, believe the JIU's work in this area has helped to overcome U.N. managers' resistance to evaluation.

In November 1978, the JIU published a glossary that has helped the organizations reach a common understanding of evaluation terms as they apply to U.N. system activities. Several months later, the Unit issued a report containing initial guidelines for the organizations to use in developing evaluation systems. Moreover, since 1978 it issued six reports on the progress and problems encountered in implementing evaluation systems. These reports provide descriptions of systems used by 24 organizations of the U.N. system and an overview of the systemwide problems that remain in integrating evaluation results with the organizations' decision-making processes.

Since 1977, the JIU has also sponsored informal meetings of U.N. system organizations' chief evaluation officers about once every 2 years. Evaluation officers we spoke to generally consider these meetings beneficial and stated they have facilitated an exchange of ideas and information on new methodologies. The Unit has also provided organizations with informal advice on how to set up evaluation units.

Although the Unit's efforts to encourage evaluation have been useful, it has not systematically devoted the prescribed portion of its resources to its statutory evaluation responsibilities and has conducted few ad hoc program evaluations.

Unit's Role in External Evaluation More Limited Than Envisioned

In 1980, we reported that the JIU's role in evaluation, along with the added funds and resources to carry it out, should contribute to a more effective Unit and result in more useful reports and assistance to the United Nations. Some 6 years later, however, we find that the Unit lacks any clear plan or strategy for its evaluation efforts, even though its budget presentations allocate time and funds between evaluation and inspection activities.

The JIU's last three biennial program budgets have stated that about 40 percent of JIU resources would be devoted to evaluation and 60 percent to inspections. The Unit also reported that it planned to issue an average of three reports a year devoted wholly or partially to evaluation.

In its glossary of evaluation terms, JIU defines evaluation as

"a learning and action-oriented management tool and process for determining as systematically and objectively as possible the relevance, effectiveness and impact of activities in the light of their objectives, in order to improve both current activities and future planning, programming, and decision-making "

In contrast, the Unit defines inspection as a special on-the-spot investigation of an activity which seeks to resolve particular problems

Few Evaluations Have Been Conducted

U.N. officials and JIU inspectors we interviewed stated the Unit has conducted a total of only two to four program evaluations since 1978. One recently retired inspector cited only two—a 1978 study on the U.N.'s public administration and finance program and a 1978 report on U.N. programs in Sri Lanka. Another official classified JIU's 1980 reports on the U.N. Disaster Relief Coordinator and the U.N. translation process as program evaluations. However, according to U.N. officials, since 1980 the Unit has conducted no program evaluations.

The JIU chairman said he did not know what percent of the Unit's resources have actually been devoted to evaluation during the past few years. However, U.N. and U.S. officials, and JIU inspectors we interviewed generally believe the Unit has devoted far less than 40 percent, despite the additional staff and funding received for this purpose.

JIU officials provided several reasons for the limited number of program evaluations conducted. One inspector said that evaluations are more complex and time-consuming than inspections and the Unit does not have enough resources to devote to them; another explained that he does not consider himself qualified to conduct evaluations of most U.N. programs and therefore only conducts inspections. The major reason, however, is that inspectors generally select the topics they work on and very few are interested in evaluation. Correspondingly, the Unit's lack of a comprehensive multi-year work program also appears to be a factor. For example, one inspector stated that too few evaluations are programmed because inspectors are more interested in conducting inspections and do not follow Unit procedures for ensuring that annual work plans are balanced.

Only one inspector, rather than two or three as envisioned, has demonstrated an interest in evaluation. This inspector's efforts have focused largely on reporting the status of U.N. system organizations' progress in implementing internal evaluation systems. During his two terms on the Unit, he participated in only two or three program evaluations. Consequently, even though the United States and others anticipated in the late 1970's that two or three inspectors would specialize in evaluation work, only one inspector in the past 8 years has spent any significant amount of time on evaluation. With that inspector's retirement in late 1985, the Unit's future role in evaluation has become even more uncertain.

State Department Needs to Encourage More JIU Evaluation

Although the State Department has recently expressed some concern about JIU's limited role in evaluation, it has not aggressively campaigned for the Unit to play a larger role. We believe the Department should enlist other member nations' support in requesting the Unit to devote more time and attention to its statutory evaluation responsibilities, especially since the Unit was given additional resources for this purpose.

In 1985, the Department expressed some concerns about the Unit's limited emphasis on evaluation. For example, in March 1985, the United States circulated a paper to Geneva Group members which asserted that the JIU should be directing more effort to reviewing the extent to which major programs are achieving their stated objectives efficiently and effectively. In November 1985, the U.S. Fifth Committee delegate told other member nations that the United States would like to see the JIU play a larger role in conducting detailed reviews of program activities in the context of their basic statutes and mandates. The United States introduced a resolution requesting the Unit to conduct more evaluations. Modified to accommodate developing nations' concerns, the resolution adopted by the General Assembly simply stated that the Unit should conduct evaluations whenever appropriate.

Except for this recent broad attempt to persuade the Unit to place more emphasis on evaluation, the Department of State has done little to advocate Unit accountability for its statutory evaluation responsibilities and associated budgetary representations. Department officials stated they would not advocate proposing that an appropriate U.N. governing body request the Unit to document time actually spent on evaluation because this would imply that the Unit should adhere to a published timetable regardless of subsequent developments. We believe such a request would be reasonable, since the JIU is accountable to the General Assembly and its members are entitled to know how the Unit has used the additional staff and financial resources provided expressly for evaluation.

Conclusions

Despite its small size and limited resources, the JIU can play a larger and more significant role in providing member nations with information on the extent to which U.N. system organizations are achieving their objectives. Member nations envisioned such a role for the Unit when they expanded its mandate in 1978. In recent years, the need for external evaluation has become even more important in view of member nations' efforts to curb U.N. system organizations' budget growth and eliminate obsolete and ineffective programs.

Although its statute and program budgets distinguish between inspection and evaluation duties, JIU's work programs and annual reports do not, making it difficult for governing bodies to assess the Unit's accomplishments in these areas. The State Department needs to develop more specific proposals and to enlist other member nations' support for means to promote high JIU priority on evaluation as well as greater visibility on what it intends to do and what it does do in this regard. For example, development of a multi-year work program would provide (1) terms of references for the planned distribution of evaluation and inspection work and (2) a documentary basis for budgetary estimates and allocations between inspection and evaluation. In addition, we believe it would be helpful if JIU's annual reports would separately summarize inspectors' work in these two major areas of endeavor. Currently, U.N. governing bodies do not receive any annual summary of JIU's evaluation activities. While JIU's annual reports have commented on informal interagency meetings sponsored by the Unit for evaluation specialists, they do not summarize other types of evaluation assistance provided to U.N. system organizations or distinguish between the Unit's evaluation and inspection reports.

By advocating and promoting the development of a work program and reporting on results of work, the Department would be promoting means by which the United States and other member nations could exercise some measure of awareness or oversight of JIU's work, both planned and performed.

The JIU has played a significant role in encouraging U.N. organizations to establish and develop their own evaluation systems. It should continue to advocate this, as well as conduct its own external evaluations of selected U.N. programs. As the systems expand their evaluation coverage, JIU should focus more on seeing how well the systems are working and what results they are producing.

Much of the Unit's past evaluation effort was largely at the initiative of one former inspector. Consequently, it is especially important that adequate oversight is exercised to ensure that the JIU builds upon and expands its own evaluation efforts and capabilities.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Secretary of State instruct U.S. representatives to seek support for U.N. efforts to require the JIU to

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- devote more resources to evaluation, to include continued emphasis on U.N. system organizations' internal evaluation systems as well as JIU external evaluation efforts;
 - provide governing bodies with information on the external evaluations the Unit plans to conduct; and
 - document its evaluation activities, including external evaluations and efforts to promote internal evaluation, in its annual report.

Agency Comments

State agreed with our recommendations, and will seek support for greater Unit involvement in conducting program results evaluations and continued review of internal U.N. evaluation.



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