

Statement of the Chairman

Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

8 December 2015

Estimates in respect of special political missions, good offices and other political initiatives authorized by the General Assembly and/or the Security Council

(ACABQ report: A/70/7/Add.10; related report: A/70/348)

Mr. Chairman,

I am pleased to introduce the Advisory Committee's report (A/70/7/Add.10) on the Secretary-General's overall resource estimates for the 35 ongoing special political missions (SPMs) for 2016 and related cross-cutting issues, as contained in his report A/70/348.

As you know, resource requirements for each of the 35 ongoing missions are submitted by the Secretary-General in the addenda 1 to 6 to his main report A/70/348. Accordingly, specific recommendations on resource requirements for these missions are contained in the reports of the Advisory Committee A/70/7/Add.11-16.

The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly approve the resources for the SPMs for 2016 requested by the Secretary-General, subject to its observations and recommendations as set out in its reports A/70/7/Add.10-16.

Mr. Chairman,

Please allow me to share with you some of the Advisory Committee's key observations on the proposed biennial provision for the SPMs for 2016-2017, the proposed estimates for 2016 and some of the related cross-cutting issues.

The Committee recalls that in its resolution 69/264, the General Assembly decided that the preliminary estimate of resources for the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2016-2017 should include a provision for SPMs in the amount of \$1,130.4 million. The Committee notes that a biennial provision of \$1,124.4 million for SPMs was included in the proposed programme budget for the biennium, instead. This amount reflects a reduction of \$6 million to the preliminary estimate decided by the Assembly. According to the Secretary-General, this reduction was part of a net reduction of \$30 million relating to efficiencies that have been distributed to the programme support components in line with Assembly resolution 69/264. The Committee requested a breakdown of the reduction as it was distributed across individual missions, but was informed that the reduction could not be broken down by mission.

The Advisory Committee is of the view that the proposed reduction of \$6 million under efficiencies for the SPMs for 2016-2017 should have been justified. In view of past experience, which indicates an inability to make precise predictions about the actual resource levels for such missions, the Committee is of the view that the level of reduction reflected in the Secretary-General's projections for the SPMs for 2016-2017 may prove optimistic (see A/70/7/Add.10, paras.7-11).

Mr. Chairman,

For the 35 continuing SPMs, the Secretary-General proposes a total number of 3,621 positions for 2016 under civilian personnel, reflecting a net reduction of 29 positions compared with those approved for 2015. This net reduction results from decreases under UNAMA (60), UNAMI (21) and UNSMIL (8), partially offset by increases under UNSOM (35), UNOCA (14), the Office of the Special Envoy for Yemen (5), UNIOGBIS (4), UNSCOL (1) and UNOWA (1). The comments and recommendations of the Advisory Committee on the proposed staffing requirements for specific missions are contained in its related reports (A/70/7/Add.11-16).

A single vacancy rate is applied in estimating staff requirements for 2016 for the SPMs. In its review of the proposed programme budget for 2016-2017, the Advisory Committee expressed the view that given the persistently long recruitment timelines connected to the filling of newly established posts, the Committee believed there would be merit in maintaining a different budgetary treatment for new and continuing posts. Consequently, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to apply vacancy rates for new positions in the estimates for 2016 for the SPMs as is the case for posts and positions established for the programme budget (see A/70/7/Add.10, para.19).

In its review of the proposed budget for 2015/16 for the support account of peacekeeping operations, the Committee was informed that with the harmonization of conditions of service and the designation of missions as family and non-family duty stations in 2010, the requirement for classification of posts/positions had been expanded to those established within SPMs. The Committee requested information on the status of the classification exercise for SPMs. The Committee was informed that preliminary classification had been undertaken for 18 SPMs, which had resulted in upgrading of 192 positions at one level and 3 positions at two levels, compared with downgrading of 6 positions at one level and 5 positions at two levels (under categories of National Professional Officer, Local Level and Field Service). The Committee was further informed that the financial impact associated with these changes would be taken into account in the context of the proposed budget for 2017. The Advisory Committee will revert to the issue in the context of its upcoming review of human resource management (see A/70/7/Add.10, para.17).

Mr. Chairman,

The Advisory Committee has discussed the matter relating to the costs and benefits of the Kuwait Joint Support Office in the past few years. The Secretary-General indicates that the establishment of the Office has enabled the Organization to realize ongoing savings from personnel-related costs as a result of the lower salaries and common staff costs prevailing in

Kuwait compared to Afghanistan and Iraq. However, the Committee notes that for 2016, the Secretary-General proposes the return of the planning and budget functions from Kuwait to Kabul for UNAMA and the relocation of most support functions from Kuwait to Iraq for UNAMI. The Committee has questioned the repeated transfer of functions back and forth between Afghanistan, Iraq and Kuwait within a relatively short period of time based on a variety of different arguments and with financial implications arising from each transfer. The Committee recalls its previous concerns with respect to the lack of clarity with regard to the structures, functions and capacity of the UNAMA and UNAMI Support Offices in Kuwait and the Kuwait Joint Support Office. The Committee is of the view that an independent verification and review of the full costs and benefits, both qualitative and quantitative, of the Support Office would be useful and intends to request the Board of Auditors to undertake such a review (see A/70/7/Add.10, paras. 56-61).

As to the implications of the development of the global service delivery model, the Committee was informed upon enquiry that the Department of Field Support is fully committed to working with the Department of Management to ensure that the model benefits from the lessons learned from the provision of shared-services support to field missions and integrates existing field service modalities where relevant, including those of the Kuwait Joint Support Office.

Mr. Chairman,

Concerning ratios for vehicle holdings proposed for 2016, the Secretary-General indicates that the proposed vehicle holdings of several special political missions vary significantly from the standard allocation, both in nominal terms and as a percentage of the standard allocation. In the view of the Advisory Committee, an issue relating to vehicle holdings by SPMs is the absence of a clear policy guideline covering all missions at different categories of duty stations. The Committee therefore recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to develop a policy with respect to the vehicle holdings by all SPMs and to report in the proposed budget for 2017, taking into consideration the mandate, size and operational requirements of individual missions (see A/70/7/Add.10, paras.24 and 25).

Mr. Chairman,

The Advisory Committee has discussed issues related to official travel in paragraphs 31 to 38 of its main report (A/70/7/Add.10). The Committee expects that with the implementation of Umoja, a detailed breakdown of trips planned and actually taken will be made available in the context of the proposed estimates for SPMs for 2017. From the information it received upon request and the limited analysis that it was able to undertake thereon, the Committee has identified instances under travel that appear to be inconsistent or over-estimated. In addition, it notes low compliance rates with the organization-wide policy that requires a 16-day advance booking of air tickets.

Mr. Chairman,

Finally, concerning the format and presentation of the proposed budget for 2016, the Advisory Committee notes the continued efforts made for improvement in response to its previous comments and recommendations. The Committee, nonetheless, continues to believe that the presentation of the information could be further improved (see A/70/7/Add.10, paras.46-47).

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Statement of the Chairman

Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

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**Estimates in respect of special political missions, good offices and other political initiatives authorized by the General Assembly and/or the Security Council
United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
(ACABQ report A/70/7/Add.15; related report: A/70/348/Add.5)**

Mr Chairman,

I am pleased to introduce the Advisory Committee's report on the study on the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (A/70/7/Add.15).

The Advisory Committee was informed that the assumptions for the proposed resource requirements for 2016 draw on the findings of a strategic assessment mission, which was conducted in April 2015.

On civilian staffing and the related vacancy factors, the Committee recalls its recommendation that the Secretary-General return to the previous practice of applying a different budgetary treatment for new and continuing posts and, therefore, recommends that the resource requirements for UNAMI be reduced to reflect the application of a separate vacancy factor for newly established posts¹.

The Advisory Committee welcomes the consolidation of similar or overlapping functions, such as the Acquisition Management Section and the Central Warehouse Section, and looks forward to receiving information on efficiencies achieved and lessons learned. The Committee considers that the operations of other special political missions may also benefit from a similar consolidation of functions, where appropriate.

Mr. Chairman,

With respect to air operations, the Committee requested detailed flight occupancy information on UNAMI's regularly scheduled flights in 2015, so as to be able to ascertain utilization rates, but did not receive such information. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to commission the Office of Internal Oversight Services to include an operational audit of UNAMI air operations in the course of its audit programme for 2016.

¹ See A/70/7, para. 57

In conclusion, I would like to note that the Advisory Committee has recommended against the transfer of the resident auditor functions of both UNAMI and UNAMA from section 3, Political affairs, to section 30, Internal oversight, as well as the merging of the Resident Audit Offices of the two missions into a single office in Kuwait². Should the General Assembly endorse the Committee's recommendation in this respect, the Committee recommends that the four positions located in the UNAMI Resident Audit Office be retained to ensure the ongoing delivery of internal audit services to the Mission.

Thank you, Mr, Chairman

² See A/70/7, para. IX.27.