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Agenda item 140:

A/70/34: Report of the Joint Inspection Unit for 2015 and programme of work for 2016

Opening statement to the Fifth Committee  
by Gopinathan Achamkulangare, Inspector/Chairman

Mr. Chairman, ... , distinguished delegates,

On behalf of the Joint Inspection Unit, I am pleased to present to the General Assembly the “Report of the Joint Inspection Unit for 2015 and programme of work for 2016” contained in document A/70/34.

The activities of the Unit in 2015 were marked by two significant efforts, one related to its substantive work, and the other, to the continuing efforts to improve its internal procedures. At the substantive level, 2015 saw the practical application of the role of the Unit as the only system-wide external oversight body with a broad mandate for inspection, evaluation, and investigation. This reflected in the Unit taking up, at the request of Member States, more complex, multi-stakeholder assignments that examine the impact of the United Nations system support for development objectives. At the same time, the traditional focus was sustained on improving management, methods and efficiency in the use of funds, as stipulated in article 5 of the JIU statute.

With respect to improving working procedures, the Unit maintained the momentum of its internal reform by introducing several new features. These included strengthening the quality assurance processes; paying greater attention to the need for more effective management, oversight and accountability practices and procedures; suggesting new ways for the presentation of reports to the legislative bodies; and, defining the guidelines for dealing systematically with comments and observations from participating organizations.

The Unit issued in 2015 five system-wide reports, plus one covering several organisations, as well as a series of management letters. Five more projects launched in 2015 will be completed in the near future. The JIU carried out a number of other activities, including strengthening the outreach and resource mobilization activities and enhancing cooperation with various United Nations management and oversight bodies. The Unit also undertook two pilot projects mandated by the General Assembly for independent system-wide evaluation for the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of the operational activities of the United Nations development system.

Of the system-wide reports pending publication, one can mention the review on “Fraud prevention, detection and response in the United Nations system organizations”, given the interest that the subject-matter has attracted among the governments and oversight communities, in the light of the unusually low level of fraud reported by the organizations of the United Nations system. It is hoped that the report will make a valuable contribution to the

activities of the United Nations in this critical area. With respect to single-organization reports, the JIU has been conducting ‘management and administration reviews’ of at least one per year in the past few years, and its contribution has won recognition and been acknowledged as highly useful by the organizations reviewed.

The Unit has been focussing on the strategic and the operational dimensions of the activities of the participating organizations, taking into account mandates received from the legislative bodies, proposals from organizations and oversight bodies, and risks associated with the system as a whole. The paramount objectives of enhancing efficiency and effectiveness within the organizations themselves and improving coordination among them are invariably kept in mind in our work.

The JIU is cognizant of the strained resource environment it confronts in taking on more complex assignments that require more research, intense consultation with stakeholders and travel. In addition to acting on specific legislative requests or addressing systemic high-risk issues, such assignments draw on the unique comparative advantage of the Unit —its horizontal scope —and, therefore, merit the investment.

The Unit is taking measures to make such an approach more feasible, given the existing resource pressures. It is limiting the number of assignments in order to enable adequate support to those selected, re-examining the way that of allocating staff and financial support to assignments, and, seeking extra-budgetary contributions and exploring ways to enhance the Unit’s capacity. It also intends to draw to the attention of the legislative bodies the full resource implications of their requests.

Further, the JIU recognizes the need to examine the way available resources are deployed. It envisages, among other things, carrying out a review of the structure of its secretariat to consider how the Unit’s contemporary needs can best be supported and assisted. The Unit would consult with the relevant entities in this endeavour and report to the General Assembly on its findings and possible realignments.

The rates of acceptance and implementation of JIU recommendations have improved in recent years. Between 2005 and 2014, the average rate of acceptance for system-wide and several organizations’ reviews has gone up to 66 per cent, while that of single organization reports (management and administration reviews) and notes went up to 82 per cent. The rates of implementation for these categories, as reported, were 80 per cent and 81 per cent respectively. The JIU is conscious of the difficulties experienced by the five smaller organizations (IMO, ITC, UNWTO, UPU and WMO) to fully accept and implement all the recommendations contained in its system-wide reports, and is pursuing a dialogue with them.

The web-based tracking system developed and used by the Unit for monitoring the acceptance and implementation of its recommendations has proved to be quite valuable. Annex III presents the indicators of achievement developed by the Unit to measure how the system has improved the tracking of recommendations, in response to resolution 69/275 in its operative paragraph 16. However, the issue of ongoing support for the periodic upgrade and maintenance of the web-based tracking system remains a challenge. The consideration by the Secretary-General of options for hosting the Unit’s web-site in-house, as requested by the General Assembly in resolution 70/247, may present an opportunity to resolve this matter and thus improve the long-term institutional arrangements for the system.

The utilization of the JIU reports is a responsibility shared between the legislative/governing bodies and the executive heads of the participating organizations. Notwithstanding this, ensuring substantive follow-up by the legislative bodies and the executive heads of the participating organizations to the findings and recommendations of the JIU reports remains a significant challenge. For its part, the Unit intends to engage in a constructive and active dialogue with organizations throughout the life-cycle of the preparation of reports and notes. The Unit will also endeavour to facilitate concrete legislative decisions, including by consistently raising the quality of recommendations, ensuring that they are practical, actionable, and easily ‘trackable’.

The Unit’s programme of work for 2016 consists of seven new projects, selected carefully through a consultative process. The projects cover system-wide issues of importance and seek to address them from a strategic and risk-based perspective. They include a review of administrative services delivery in the United Nations system; knowledge management in the United Nations system; a review of travel policies; donor-led accountability and oversight reviews; a comprehensive review of the system-wide support for small island developing States; and management and administration reviews. They represent a reasonable balance and a good mix of system-wide versus single organization reviews with varying degrees of complexity and scope.

In 2016, the Joint Inspection Unit marks the fiftieth anniversary of its founding. The Unit seeks, in this context, to reiterate its commitment to serve effectively as the only system-wide independent external oversight mechanism that embraces all the participating organizations. The JIU re-dedicates itself to responding to the needs and requirements of the legislative/governing bodies of the participating organizations, while working closely with their executive heads. It also re-commits itself to fulfilling its mandate to help to enhance effectiveness and efficiency, as well as support coordination among the participating organizations. The Unit will adapt to new priorities defined by the legislative bodies. For example, the implementation of the recently adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development presents a series of challenges to the United Nations system for the next decade and a half. The Joint Inspection Unit is committed to play a supportive role, within its mandate, in addressing these challenges.

Finally, we bade farewell to the four inspectors who left the Unit at the end of 2015 and welcomed their successors. The new composition includes three women, the largest ever.

I look forward to comments of distinguished delegates on the report, and would be happy to answer questions and provide clarifications, as necessary.

I thank you all for your kind attention.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.