



JOINT INSPECTION UNIT
of the United Nations System

CORPS COMMUN d'INSPECTION
du Système des Nations Unies

UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifth Committee, 73rd Session, 12 October 2017
Agenda Item 141: Human Resources Management

Presentation of Joint Inspection Unit Report JIU/REP/2017/9

Review of mechanisms and policies addressing conflict of interest in the United Nations system (A/73/187)

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

This statement introduces the Report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) entitled “Review of mechanisms and policies addressing conflict of interest in the United Nations system” (JIU/REP/2017/9), contained in document A/73/187. The author of the report, Mr. Rajab Sukayri, concluded his service as Inspector at the end of 2017.

The primary objectives of this system-wide review are to assess the adequacy of United Nations system organizations’ regulatory frameworks and the mechanisms and practices to address existing and potential conflicts of interest. The Charter of the United Nations sets the foundation for the recognition that the interest of the United Nations is the sole prevailing interest that all its staff members, the staff members of its funds and programmes, its specialized agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) should have in view when performing their duties.

The International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) standards of conduct for the international civil service and the respective legal instruments and policies that were reviewed indicate that personal conflicts of interest are well addressed for staff and non-staff employed in the United Nations system. The review also found that organizational contractual provisions are silent with regard to the staff and non-staff obligations concerning conflicts of interest after separation from a United Nations system organization. It also found that the issue of organizational conflict of interest has been less thoroughly examined and requires distinct attention.

In most United Nations system organizations, the ethics office is tasked with interpreting and advising whether or not a situation constitutes a conflict of interest. This service is available to all staff members and is valued as an objective and consistent source of advice on issues relating to conflict of interest.

The report emphasizes the importance of training staff members on professional ethics as a way of strengthening understanding standards of conduct and reinforcing for staff the importance of integrity in the United Nations system. The availability of data, however, on completion of ethics training courses, attendance and compliance rates varies among organizations.

The review found that there is no mechanism in place to periodically remind staff in United Nations system organizations of their obligations and the ethical conduct required, including on conflicts of interest. To address the gap, the JIU recommends reinforcing staff acceptance of the standards of conduct at their entry on duty, as well as at subsequent, regular intervals during their service with their respective organizations.

Financial disclosure and conflict of interest statements are useful deterrent measures. The report reviews the practices applied in different organizations, reflects views expressed on their limitations in terms of actually detecting corruption, as well on measures that could improve the cost-effectiveness of such programmes. The present report is consistent with the recommendations in two earlier JIU reports - on accountability frameworks (JIU/REP/2011/5) and fraud prevention and detection (JIU/REP/2016/4) – which recommended that all JIU participating organizations, implement financial disclosure and conflict of interest policies, expeditiously. At the same time, it recommends that the General Assembly and other legislative bodies request detailed reports on existing financial disclosure programmes, that would include recommendations on needed improvements

This review makes six formal and five informal (soft) recommendations aimed at reinforcing the monitoring of established mechanisms or the introduction new elements system-wide. The review findings align with previous integrity and accountability related JIU reviews and therefore some of the soft recommendations reiterate the critical elements in those previous reports.

Overall, the recommendations aim to enhance coherence, harmonization, and effectiveness of mechanisms and policies addressing conflict of interest, as well as to reinforce control, compliance, and accountability of staff and non-staff across the system.