

CAN A NON-PERFORMING JIU GO ON FOREVER?

While the JIU was busy ensuring its survival in New York and in other UN system headquarters cities during the late 1990s, expert criticisms of the Unit continued apace. They were more blunt about fundamental JIU failings than ever before. In 1997 a prestigious "insider" group of senior UN officials, Member State delegates, and expert analysts questioned JIU's contribution and urged re-examination of its effectiveness:

"[Most participants] agreed that [the oversight bodies -- JIU, OIOS, Board of Auditors] are in need of better coordination and would benefit from staff that is both more competent and knowledgeable of their jobs. The JIU, in particular, was criticized. To perform oversight, one needs to have an intimate knowledge of programs, but staff at *JIU are seen as having insufficient knowledge of the programs they oversee (betrayed by their frequent unsophisticated questions about program operations.) The oversight staff is small, they are not adequately versed in UN programs, and they rely on what is delivered to them by those they oversee. As a result, JIU's oversight cannot be more than 'impressionistic.'*

With these liabilities, participants urged reexamination of the output, composition, and effectiveness of the JIU. At an average cost of \$400,000, JIU reports are simply too costly. Several suggested [obtaining] far better work from the private sector. Others believed that the JIU is poorly designed, and its mandate is not clear. *Numerous participants recommended JIU be eliminated altogether.* [Another suggestion was that] at a minimum, if the JIU cannot be significantly altered some of its functions should be contracted out to the private sector."

Stanley Foundation, "Making UN reform work: Improving Member State-Secretariat relations", Report on Conference of **February 21-23, 1997**, pp. 27-28. [emphasis added]

Yves Beigbeder's third decade-by-decade assessment of the JIU in 1997 was also much tougher than its predecessors:

"The first priority is to ensure ... [qualified] inspectors ... with a proper mix of expertise. Nominating countries should offer multiple candidates. External auditors are not appointed among serving or retired diplomats: *asking diplomats to undertake management surveys and give management advice to executive heads ... is a sure recipe for quality problems and the quiet burying of their recommendations.* ...

If the General Assembly does not ... [properly select] Inspectors, a drastic remedy would be to abolish the Unit ... [or] letting the JIU die a natural death by attrition. ...

An intermediate solution would consist in trying to improve the expertise and efficiency of the Unit and to reduce its staff costs. The 'top-heavy' unit ... could be reduced from 11 to 3 or 5 [inspectors ... with non-political, non-diplomatic [management

experts added] at senior professional levels. ...

Governments have to decide whether the Unit should be abolished or retained. If retained, the Unit should be re-formed so that it becomes what it was meant to be: a respected watchdog in identifying and publicizing administrative errors or abuses, mismanagement, inefficiency and duplication, a mentor in proposing management reforms, a competent and independent body of international management experts."

Yves Beigbeder, The internal management of United Nations organizations: The long quest for reform, St. Martins Press, New York, **1997**, pp. 41- 45.

[emphasis added]

A 1999 expert group meeting on financial oversight and accountability in the UN system also examined oversight work by the Board of Auditors, OIOS, and the JIU. The Board of Auditors drew little criticism, and the OIOS received favorable comments (although with some doubts and a very pertinent question of who polices the oversight police.) As to the JIU, however, the group found that:

" ... the [JIU] ... was conceived as the scourge of inefficiency and duplication across U.N. agencies. (Instead, the terror the JIU actually inspires in agencies today has far less to do with fear that its inspectors will uncover embarrassing inefficiencies than the drain it will impose on [agency] budgets, which ... pay for ... JIU inspections and reports. ... doubts about the usefulness of its past work haunt discussion of its future prospects. Widely viewed as having failed to meet the expectations for it, the JIU suffers from a lack of respect even within the U.N. system ... The JIU was allocated \$4.6 million a year] for 1996-1997 ...

If the debate on the [OIOS] reflects the discomfort of an agency ... viewed as so credible and effective as to be too powerful, that on the [JIU] demonstrates the difficulty of regaining credibility once it is lost. The showcase of [UN reform in the 1970s], by the 1980s the unit had earned a reputation for reports recycling conventional wisdom that were remarkable mainly for their stupefying superficiality. ..."

United Nations Association of the USA, "Conference on financial oversight and accountability in the United Nations system", October 30 - November 1, 1998, Princeton, NJ, USA, **April 1999**, pp. 4-8. [emphasis added]

Since the UN is the UN, the JIU paid only fleeting attention to these annoying critiques. It was simply concerned with getting back to "business as usual" -- not independent external oversight, but "jobs for the boys" -- as clearly reaffirmed by its victorious battle in the "informal consultations" at the General Assembly's Fifth Committee in 1997 through 1999.

[Note: There have been only three women among the 50-some JIU Inspectors since 1978, all of them serving within the past decade.]

In the UN culture, this diplomatic takeover of the JIU is very understandable. It allows people from Member State missions, in many cases, to increase their incomes from as little as a few thousand dollars or less a month in their national service to a very handsome \$10,000-plus monthly from the UN. It also allows them to enjoy all the allowances, benefits, travel, VIP status,

very generous pensions thereafter, and, far from least -- no performance pressure to do any work. In addition, it provides small (or very small) countries a chance at a top UN job: JIU Inspectors have come *inter alia* from Barbados, Burkina Faso, the Dominican Republic, Jordan, Mauritania, Romania, and Tanzania.

[Note: The five permanent members of the UN Security Council always had JIU posts reserved, but have not had that much interest. The United Kingdom dropped out in the early 1980s, and the French lost an election at the end of the 1980s to Greece (about four of the "Group B" western countries usually propose candidates for their group's two allocated Inspector posts, thus adding at least a little political competition to the process.) The Americans (the traditional JIU "sponsors") were ignominiously voted off the JIU in 1998, but fought their way back in in 2002. Only Russia has always had a seat, and China took its seat for the very first time in 2003.]

In February 2002, however, things heated up again. The General Assembly resumed the old calls for more timely JIU reports and high-priority topics that would deal with concrete problems and provide action-oriented recommendations, and more evaluation-oriented work (all of which which had been recommended, to no avail, as far back as 1986.) And, in January 2003, the Assembly repeated these many admonitions, and requested the Unit to report thereon.

"Report of the Joint Inspection Unit", General Assembly resolutions 56/245 of 5 February 2002, and 57/284 A-B of 29 January 2003.

These two resolutions brought another burst of JIU reform rhetoric. A first report noted that since the General Assembly had approved the JIU permanent statute in 1976, "momentous changes" had occurred and the organizations had greatly improved their resource management. Along with this evolution, the role of the JIU) should have become more relevant. The Unit, following earnest "in-depth" internal reviews, identified its weaknesses as more chiefs (the Inspectors) than indians (staff), which could be rectified by decreasing the former or increasing the latter. The Unit has no power of decision, and action on its recommendations is "too rare an occurrence." The Unit's work programme is a mishmash that requires a strategy (an old promise, which the Unit presented, conceptually, in a lengthy annex).

"Report of the [JIU] on the preliminary review of its statute and working methods: Note by the Secretary-General", UN document A/58/343 of 5 September 2003, Part II.

Two months later the JIU issued a more detailed analysis. Some agencies liked the idea of reducing the number of Inspectors, and this could be considered. The General Assembly, should establish a new job description for Inspectors; carefully review [*future*] candidates proposed and the "appropriate ratio" between Inspectors and staff; and choose a better mix of study types -- among audits, inspections, and investigations.

In this and in yet a third paper, the JIU stoutly (but very vaguely) defended its record. It spoke of its "huge accumulated experience" with agency operations, a sudden new desire to launch dynamic investigations of waste and mismanagement, its great potential as a management consulting group, and more informal consultations and JIU "notes" to work more closely with the agencies, all as part of a new JIU "strategic framework" and "risk assessments". In April 2004, the General Assembly "took note" of this JIU "internal reform process", and decided to continue discussions at its 59th session in the autumn of 2004.

"Report of the [JIU] on the in-depth review of its statute and working methods: Note by the Secretary-General", UN document A/58/343/Add. 1 of **18 November 2003**,

"Report of the [JIU] on the in-depth review of its statute and working methods: Note by the Secretary-General", UN document A/58/343/Add. 2 of **17 February 2004**, and

"Report of the Joint Inspection Unit," General Assembly resolution 58/286 of **26 April 2004**.

So, once again, IO Watch finds that the JIU very sincerely reviews itself and finds itself to be "OK", but still ready for rigorous self-assessment and reform. This time it does admit that maybe there are too many inspectors, and that the JIU Statute could be reexamined (a dangerous opening of Pandora's box, but one that the JIU hopes or bets it can win during "informal consultations" on the matter at the General Assembly, in alliance with its diplomatic friends.)

However, the JIU then goes overboard, arguing that the current Inspectors and JIU staff (most of whom are new, and with no management analysis experience) can properly use JIU's "huge experience", suddenly perform professional investigations of waste and mismanagement, act as management consultants and advisors, and do much more informal (i. e., non-public) work with the agencies.

IO Watch has presented a factual (not rhetorical) review and update of the undistinguished and declining JIU performance record over the past 35 years, and its recent survival battles. The sharp, persistent, and consistent criticisms of poor JIU performance and calls for its reform (or even abolition) still apply, as cited in the pointed quotations from the preceding subsection:

- the US GAO reports in 1974 and 1979, and the first Beigbeder assessment in 1979;

- WIPO in 1981;
- ILO and FAO officials in 1985;
- the "Group of 18" experts, the US GAO, and Ghebali in 1986;
- Beigbeder in 1987 and the CCAQ inter-agency committee in 1988;
- the General Assembly, throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s;
- Hübner in 1991 and Alves in 1991;
- the ACABQ and the *Washington Post* in 1992;
- Thornburgh in 1993;
- Childers and Urquhart, and Spiers in 1994, and the *International Documents Review* and Righter in 1995;
- the CCAC and CCPOC interagency bodies, and especially the ACC group of UN system executive heads, in 1995-1997, and Gordenker in 1996;
- the ILO and UNESCO breakaway attempts, the Stanley Foundation experts, and Beigbeder again in 1997;
- and the UNA/USA seminar in 1999.

Paul Light's excellent criteria for determining the oversight effectiveness of inspector generals provide a good set of standards with which to assess JIU performance, as was done with the OIOS in an earlier subsection.

" ... defining effectiveness in purely organizational or dollar terms is far too narrow. Effectiveness also rests in what is best for government. ... Using this broader definition of effectiveness prompts at least five questions of IG operations:

(1) How professional are the offices? (2) How deep is the coverage? (3) How great are the savings? (4) How good are the cases? (5) How visible are the results? The first two questions deal with inputs ... the final three ... with outputs which in turn give at least some sense of the impacts on fraud, waste, and abuse. ...

Light, Paul C., Monitoring government: Inspectors General and the search for accountability, Brookings, Washington, D.C., 1993, pp. 204, 220-223.
[emphasis added.]

And extra transparency is suddenly provided by the JIU itself. After years of keeping a very, very low profile in

Geneva, a JIU internet website suddenly blossomed in 2004, providing for the first time public access to all recent JIU reports, its annual reports, relevant General Assembly resolutions, current JIU reform promises, biographical information on the current Inspectors, and other material.

[Note: The JIU website is at www.unsystem.org/jiu/new/home.htm .]

At this pivotal point of renewed consideration of JIU's future, IO Watch presents the following twelve summary items to assess current JIU performance in light of the many previous expert criticisms, the Light oversight criteria, and the up-to-date JIU website information.

1. PROFESSIONALISM

Highly-trained and skilled people are essential for any organization, especially one reviewing complex management and performance issues worldwide and throughout the UN and the UN system. However, an analysis of the background of current JIU Inspectors, presented on the new JIU website, shows the same old amateurism so rightly and repeatedly criticized in the past.

Only one of the ten current Inspectors (one post is vacant) seems fully qualified for his work: a certified public accountant, a former UN director of administration, with previous experience on oversight and audit bodies. All the others were essentially career foreign ministry people, with most citing service as their country's representatives at various UN bodies. Seven of the ten were once members of ACABQ (although it is not known if any of them were among the three of the 16 total ACABQ members who are required to be actual, recognized "financial experts".)

Of the nine unqualified Inspectors, two did have masters' degrees in business administration, while the others had no management degrees. None of the nine cited any relevant professional certification; training programmes or even single courses completed in audit, evaluation, or investigation; or membership in professional management societies. Only one inspector had ever written or published any paper or management report (on UN reform). And among those who disclosed their age, all were between 57 and 65, (i.e., many beyond UN retirement age.)

The professional management analysis qualifications, experience and achievements, and competencies of the eight JIU research officers and five management assistants are not specified at all. The JIU did undergo a drastic turnover of its professional staff (some more than once) in the last half-dozen years, which thus erased the "institutional memory" of its former staff. It would therefore seem important to assess as well the specific competence of the new and old JIU staff, in determining overall JIU "due diligence" in the essential matter of professional fitness for the work to be done.

2. PRODUCTIVITY

The business of the JIU is very simple: to prepare action-oriented expert reports for the General Assembly and other UN system governing bodies on the efficiency of UN operations and the proper use of funds. Apparently because the JIU now produces so few reports, however, it downplays this central task -- the introductory statement of the aims of JIU on its website never even mentions the word "reports". Instead, the Unit now argues for and promises extensive "consultation" with governing bodies and Secretariats (i.e., activities with no tangible output but much pleasant travel to New York and European headquarters cities of UN system organizations, see also "travel costs" below.)

In the last decade, from 1994 through 2003, the JIU issued a total of 80 reports (not counting some "notes," which have even less impact since they go only to executive heads, to do with as they please.) The JIU average is eight reports per year, (not even one per Inspector), and for 24 report-preparation people in total. The reports are also only about 30 pages long, and rely heavily on opinions rather than detailed and original analysis. At a cost of some \$4 million a year to operate the JIU, each such report costs about \$500,000.

Furthermore, Inspectors vary greatly in their individual productivity. As shown on the JIU website, in 2001, of the six total JIU reports, 3 inspectors each produced one report alone, 3 others were involved in "shared" reports, another coordinated a "Unit" report, and 4 Inspectors produced no reports at all. In 2002, a rare burst of energy led to 12 reports involving all 11 Inspectors.

The old pattern, however, resumed in 2003, with 1 Inspector producing 2 reports alone, 2 others 1 report each, 5 others crowding together on 2 more reports, and, again 3 Inspectors producing no reports at all (there were apparently only six reports, since report 2003/4 seems to have disappeared.) The Inspectors, individually and collectively, are not a high-productivity group. In fact, as of mid-August 2004, no JIU reports had been issued less than one month before the new General Assembly begins in New York (or at least put on the website, which a Unit concerned about its future should do), indicating zero (that is 0.0) reports produced by 11 Inspectors over a seven-month period.

3. WHO WRITES THE JIU REPORTS?

As noted in the introductory subsection, an enthusiastic JIU chairman told the General Assembly's Fifth Committee in 1981 that JIU senior professional staff posts needed to be upgraded because they write JIU reports and contribute the key ideas. The JIU has subsequently been much more guarded when questioned directly about who writes its reports, either evading the issue or stating that it is a "shared responsibility" between Inspectors and JIU staff, which is however never specifically explained.

The situation has not changed. The JIU budget submission for the biennium 2002-2003, for instance, clearly stated that senior professional staff were "very deeply involved" in studies, but that even junior professionals are expected to do a lot of report drafting, and even clerical "management assistants" also prepare analyses and charts for reports, although they have little if any management education and skills.

In contrast, as already noted, most JIU inspectors have almost no professional management analysis credentials, no report-writing experience, no methodological expertise, and, often, some real limitations in English -- the language in which all JIU reports are now written. Altogether, the JIU has some 24 people producing eight 30-page reports each year, or about less than 1 page per person per month. There must, in fact, be serious doubt that the Inspectors themselves honor their basic and specific responsibility under the JIU Statute, namely that:

"The Inspectors shall draw up, over their own signature, reports for which they are responsible and in which they shall state their findings and propose solutions to the

problems that they have noted."

Joint Inspection Unit, Statute, United Nations, Geneva, 1978, Article 11, para. 2.

4. QUALITY CONTROL

The three assessment quotes from the late 1990s presented earlier in this subsection summarize quite well the basic criticisms of JIU.

The Inspectors "have insufficient knowledge of the programs they oversee" and "rely on what is delivered ... by those they oversee," so that JIU "oversight cannot be more than impressionistic" (the experts at the Stanley Foundation meeting, 1997.) "Asking diplomats to undertake management surveys and give management advice to executive heads ... is a sure recipe for quality problems and the quiet burying of their recommendations" (Beigbeder in 1997). And "the JIU suffers from a lack of respect even within the U.N. system", having "earned a reputation for reports recycling conventional wisdom that were remarkable mainly for their stupefying superficiality" (UNA/USA conference, 1999).

An old oversight unit aphorism says that "one bad report spoils ten good ones," thus emphasizing the importance of careful quality control. The JIU, however, relies on the "collective wisdom" of its inspectors, which does not seem to help much, and a stack of procedures and guidelines used by oversight professionals, which the JIU ignores in practice.

Many vague, or self-serving, careless or unimportant, recent JIU reports could be mentioned, but one in particular must be noted. A JIU "evaluation" report in 2000, on a UN women's institute, INSTRAW -- is perhaps the worst evaluation report ever published anywhere. The institute (the only UN organization located in the lead Inspector's home country) has struggled (and continues to struggle) with funding and performance problems. His report was a spirited plea for the institute, finding it to be a "remarkable success" and providing "very good value for money". However, desperate to come up with something evaluative, the report pleaded lack of time and cited only one actual assessment -- done by several Nordic countries in 1991, eight years earlier, and itself not always favorable. This JIU report is available for downloading on the JIU website.

Joint Inspection "An evaluation of the United Nations International Research

and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW)", JIU/REP/99/2 of **June 1999**, available on the JIU website.

The JIU has still issued a few good reports in recent years, such as an excellent analysis of UN recruitment, placement, and promotion (see, on the JIU website, reports 1995/1 and 1996/6), appointments of UN senior officials (2000/3), and the "results approach" in the UN (2002/2). But there have been many more "so what?" reports and some very questionable ones. Briefly, from among all the examples, one could note:

-- a mind-boggling JIU conceptual study on calculating equitable "geographic distribution" formulas for dividing up staff posts (1996/7), that was so disorderly that the Inspectors had to apologize when presenting it to the Fifth Committee in New York;

-- a massive JIU report on a grand reorganization of all UN system training institutions (1997/6), which somehow neglected to identify those institutions -- the JIU promised to issue an annex listing them, but then apparently forgot about it;

-- a potentially very useful JIU report on the UN internal "administration of justice" system (2000/1), which however failed totally to analyse the system's operations, costs, and functioning, settling instead for much "heresay" gossip on ways to patch up the old decrepit system (see this archive's subsection on that topic);

-- A self-serving JIU report on the use of management consultants (2000/2) urged the use of available "expertise" within the UN (including of course the JIU) or "geographically-distributed" national experts, as opposed to "excessive reliance on outside consultants", whom many UN system organizations now regularly utilize;

-- reports on the role of certain "civil society" groups (2002/1) in UN development work and on "multilingualism" (2002/11) are hardly the high-priority, concrete, reviews of "efficiency ... and the proper use of funds" which JIU is mandated and repeatedly urged to perform, although nothing has been quite as trivial as the JIU report on "Managing works of art" (1992/7);

-- a rare JIU "mud on the boots" field review, an "evaluation" of the effectiveness of the already much-studied UN system nation-building operation in East Timor (2002/10), was based on a mere 5-day visit to that country, and paralleled a concurrent review by the OIOS; and

-- another grand "thought piece" on "enhancements" and strategies to improve the UN budgetary process (2003/2) gave almost no consideration to the central UN management culture barriers, cited by OIOS in 2002 and many others before and since, that have undermined this process for decades [as discussed in this archive's subsection, *inter alia*, on Programme Planning System (PPBE) .]

[Note: again, all these JIU reports are available for direct review or downloading under "JIU reports" on the JIU website, at www.unsystem.org/jiu/new/home.htm .]

5. WORK PROGRAMMES

A professional oversight unit has coherent and well-formulated multi-year work programmes and sticks to them, while making adjustments as time goes on. In the early 1980s the JIU also carried out such processes, but subsequently, JIU work programming became progressively more disorderly, with little sense of coherence. The JIU proposes a batch of new studies each year, but many never start, or fall by the wayside, or drag on for years and destroy their timeliness. The most recent such episode came in 2002, when the JIU informed the General Assembly that:

"The current-year work programme ... contains five new reports and one new note. In addition ... the Unit has been preparing at least 16 reports and notes, which have been carried forward from previous years' [plural] work plans ..."

"Joint Inspection Unit: Note by the Secretary-General" [work programme for 2002], **26 March 2002**, para. 3.

In the event, the Unit published only 12 reports in 2002, and then, apparently exhausted, slumped back to only 6 or 7 in 2003. A new crisis may be underway as (according to the website) no reports had been issued by mid-August 2004. There seems to be a long-established JIU annual work cycle of inaction in the spring and summer, followed by energetic issuance of most of the reports between October and February, which hardly gets them to the General Assembly in a timely fashion.

The JIU thus often has as many as 20 studies underway, plus others piled up and awaiting consideration in governing bodies. The JIU has also spent little time in the past 15 years on the top-priority and dominant peacekeeping, humanitarian, and development field operations of the UN system. Instead, the Inspectors concentrate on studies and visits at agency headquarters programmes, particularly in New York and Europe.

The 21st century world spins ever faster, but the little JIU, sitting comfortably in Geneva, can never even come close to catching up.

6 NEW "MANAGEMENT REVIEWS"

A new feature of JIU work in the past half-dozen years has been sweeping management and administrative review reports on entire specialized agencies: ILO in 1999, UNESCO in 2000, WHO and ITU in 2001, and FAO in 2002. Reviewing an organization's management system is a formidable and complex task, which would require a large team and multiple months of on-site work even if done by a large international management consulting firm.

However, the JIU has somehow managed to churn out five organisation-wide studies in the midst of its other work. The reports, on review, seem very broad-brush, long on sweeping conclusions and facile recommendations, but short on detailed and original analysis to back them up. One must wonder, again, whether these studies are, as noted under "Quality control" above, just received wisdom from fellow diplomats in the national missions at these organizations, repackaged into a superficial report.

The JIU study of UNESCO in 2000, for instance, compares poorly with a similar but much more focused and analytical study of UNESCO prepared by the US General Accounting Office in 1992. The JIU study seems to be almost all prescription, with a summary containing 19 recommendations and a mind-boggling 48 sub-recommendations in seven pages of very small print. The GAO study, however, was predominantly analytical and systematic, with 12 total recommendations in five areas which would fit comfortably on one page.

Joint Inspection Unit, "Review of management and Administration in the [UNESCO]," JIU/REP/200/4 of **September 2000**, and
US General Accounting Office, "UNESCO: Status of improvements in management, personnel, financial, and budgeting practices," GAO/NSIAD-92-172, **1992**.

One more disturbing element is the motivation for these sudden sweeping studies. They began only after the CEB (then the ACC) group of UN system agency executive heads urged the General Assembly to commission a critical review of JIU effectiveness, and ILO and UNESCO sought to reduce their financial participation

in the JIU. When JIU survived this challenge, the first grand reviews that it made were of the ACC, the ILO, and UNESCO. Revenge is a poor rationale for making management reviews, especially reviews that badly overreach the analysts' capacities.

7. TRAVEL COSTS

Some 90 percent of JIU costs are staff costs, especially for inspectors, but the Inspectors also get some \$250,000 a year to make their "on-the-spot" inquiries around the world. This aspect deserves a little more coverage, because one of the UN's deepest "secrets" is the widespread abuse of "official missions", and especially of automatic per diem payments amounting to several hundred dollars per day), especially by the senior officials who travel most.

The JIU itself has issued reports urging efficient travel expenditures (see report 95/10 on the website) and tight control of officials' attendance at meetings. Yet the Unit itself has been sharply criticized several times for regarding equal annual travel fund shares as a personal perquisite of Inspectors, rather than allocating funds for varying field work requirements as needed. Each time (and again in September 2003 in their "reform" reports), the Inspectors dutifully promise to reform their travel spending, but then continue on as before. In particular, many concentrate on visits to agency headquarters cities in Europe, and particularly on lengthy "attendance" at the General Assembly in New York every autumn, under the guise of consultations or "presenting their reports," rather than on duty and preparing reports in Geneva.

It should also be noted that JIU's operations and expenditures have apparently never been audited during its 35 years of existence, by either the OIOS and its predecessors or by the Board of Auditors, although both groups are obliged to systematically audit all UN programmes and units. The UN, in fact, provides administrative support to the JIU on behalf of the specialized agencies who also pay its bills, but apparently the UN oversight units have always given a "free pass" to their fellow overseers, the JIU.

8. JIU COSTS , SAVINGS, AND "VALUE FOR MONEY"

Many analysts have quickly figured out JIU's costing: it prepares an average of eight reports a year while spending some \$4 million, so the average JIU report costs a very hefty \$500,000. JIU inspectors object to this obvious math, and attempt to evade the issue by arguing that they must "consult" extensively (and informally) at agencies and their governing body meetings, a conspicuously ambiguous and hard-to-measure activity.

The eight JIU reports each year average about 30 pages each, or 240 pages of JIU reports a year. That is 22 pages a year (or less than 2 pages a month) per Inspector, but even that applies only if one ignores all the report writing work done by JIU staff. Should someone really receive \$200,000 in annual salary and benefits for 10 years for such a tiny output, particularly when the reports are often ignored?

In addition, cost savings are a very important measure of successful oversight work, and the JIU is indeed expected by Article 5 of its Statute to "ensure the proper use of funds." Yet JIU's cost savings achieved in the past decade appear to be zero. In 1992 the Inspectors hired a consultant, who estimated cost savings from JIU reports from 1984-1991 of about \$120 million. Not bad at all, but that amount applied only IF the JIU recommendations had been implemented, which could not be determined. Ever since, however, when JIU is asked about cost savings, it simply refers to this old report. The JIU Inspectors are now suddenly pledging to root out waste and mismanagement, but they lack the sophisticated professional skills to do so.

Some \$75 million or more has probably been spent on the JIU since 1968. But some agency officials argue correctly that JIU work costs the UN system even more, since the organizations must regularly spend much time responding to often-lengthy JIU questionnaires, hosting Inspector visits, and processing and commenting on JIU reports to their governing bodies. There is also a second JIU cost add-on: many of the recommendations in JIU reports would be quite expensive to implement, especially the many "motherhood" ones on coordination among agencies, yet the JIU keeps right on making them.

In 1994, the JIU promised the General Assembly and other governing bodies of the UN system that it would institute some important "good oversight practices" -- concentrating its work more on cost-savings matters, and clearly stating in its reports

the financial implications of its recommendations, both those concerning cost savings and that which would require additional resources to implement. To the present day, it has never done so. On the issue of costs and cost-benefit, the JIU is definitely a loser.

"Report of the Joint Inspection Unit", UN document A/49/34, **1994**, para. 65.

9. FOLLOW-UP OF JIU RECOMMENDATIONS

Every professional oversight organization follows up systematically on the results and impact of its work. JIU's main problem is that it makes many recommendations in many reports to many governing bodies on many topics, and must often wait several years to get the agencies to consider them, at which point most agencies say nothing; merely "take note" of the JIU recommendations made; or endorse their Secretariat's general comments on them. The General Assembly pressed the Unit to regularly assess and report on action on its recommendations in the late 1980s, but after several years the JIU tired of the effort and simply stopped reporting.

Instead, the Unit came up with a great diversion -- all its participating organizations should themselves report how they had accepted and implemented the JIU resolutions thrown at them. The UN, for instance, has dutifully commented on a few old JIU reports each year, because the Assembly requests it. The JIU launched an elaborate plan to involve all agencies in the follow-up process.

This effort dragged on for several years, with very modest results. Yet it has only postponed the day of reckoning, when the report-tracking system will reveal what everyone already suspects -- that JIU recommendations are simply too vague, superficial, complex, ambiguous or costly for the agencies to implement: that is, they have very little impact. Meanwhile, 25 years have passed without the General Assembly or anyone else firmly demanding that JIU prove the value of its work by regularly citing decisive actions, and meaningful achievements, resulting from its reports and recommendations.

In 2001, the JIU pressed the General Assembly to urge all agencies to adopt the new reports-consideration process. In late 2003, however, the JIU suddenly announced, paradoxically and

curiously, that because it would be doing more informal notes and consultations with agencies, the half-implemented process should be put into limbo:

" ... the Unit believes there is no urgent need to pursue the new procedure described in its annual report for 2001 and suggests that the topic be revisited after a reasonable period, say two to four years hence."

"Report of the [JIU] on the in-depth review of its statute and working methods: Note by the Secretary-General", UN document A/58/343/Add. 1 of **18 November 2003**, paras. 30-35 [34.]

[Note: two earlier reports on this topic were

"Report of the [JIU] on experience with the follow-up system on [JIU] reports and recommendations: Note of the Secretary-General", UN document A/56/356 of **18 September 2001**, and

"Report of the Joint Inspection Unit", UN document A/57/34, **2002**, paras. 21-32.

10. SHIFTING BLAME

Having thus successfully evaded the question of JIU results by postponing this fundamental question ever further into the indefinite future, the JIU had also launched another gambit in its 1994 annual report -- *tu quoque* (you too!). The Unit stated then, and has repeated constantly ever since, that Member States and the participating UN system organizations have a "shared responsibility" with JIU, and should "support the Unit, if it is to continue to perform efficiently."

"Report of the Joint Inspection Unit", UN document A/49/34, **1994**, paras. 51-73.

An organization providing a mediocre product or service, and especially a privileged monopoly like the JIU, should not blame its captive customers. The JIU has had 25 years to refine its product (those eight reports a year). But as the UNA/USA seminar of 1999 observed, it is "widely viewed as having failed to meet the expectations for it ... [and] suffers from a lack of respect even within the U.N. system". The organizations, in particular, and outside experts as well, have repeatedly urged real (not cosmetic) reform of the JIU, most specifically all the UN system agency heads in the ACC through the proposed external expert review in 1996-1997. Yet the JIU still repeats the "shared responsibility" idea constantly, seeking to spread its primary guilt to others, and as widely as possible.

11. EMPTY JIU ANNUAL REPORTS

As already noted, the JIU probably holds one "worst" world record, for its very poor evaluation report on INSTRAW in 1999. However, its annual reports to the General Assembly and the other UN system agencies constitute a second "world worst", since they are surely among the least transparent and informative to be found anywhere in the world.

As can be seen on the JIU website, these featherweight documents are composed of almost blank pages, with a little "boilerplate" material on the Unit's basic functions, a list of Inspectors, a few paragraphs on its routine activities, some material on consultations, a statement of good intentions for the future, and a last page listing its few reports issued that year (titles only).

It is amazing that the General Assembly regularly accepts such uninformative and literally empty reports, compared to the lengthy, substantive, and informative reports of the OIOS or the Board of Auditors. Yet the Inspectors cannot be accused of lacking nerve: in a 1998 report on improving UN system oversight, they actually recommended that they should periodically critique the annual reports of all UN system agency internal oversight bodies to identify problems and highlight good practices. They should have begun with a failing grade for, and total restructuring of, their own totally inadequate annual reports.

"... Executive Heads [should] submit a consolidated annual summary report on internal oversight activities that concisely provides (i) an overview of the issues addressed and accomplishments achieved; (ii) a record of recommendations and status of actions taken on them; and (iii) issues or recommendations requiring action by Executive Heads or legislative organs. ...

Based on its system-wide mandate, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) should include in its annual programme of work, periodically, an overall analysis of the consolidated annual summary reports on internal oversight activities ... for the purpose of identifying system-wide issues and problems, as well as good practices that other organizations of the System could find beneficial."

"More coherence for enhanced oversight in the United Nations system", JIU report 98/2, **July 1998**, recommendations, p. v, Recommendations 2 and 4 [available on the JIU website.]

Note: Discussion of this topic continues in the subsection on Can a non-performing JIU go on forever?, II.