



UNITED NATIONS  
UNIVERSITY

## EVENT REPORT:

### “Watchdog or Lapdog?”

### Maximizing the Value of Internal Oversight for a Better United Nations”

15 October, 2009

**Attendees:** Approximately 200

**Webcast Participants:** 43

**Partners:** UN Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS)

The Secretary-General of the UN, **Mr. Ban Ki-moon**, began his remarks by congratulating the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on its fifteenth anniversary. He highlighted the value of a professional oversight body in a complex organization with a broad agenda, like the UN, while emphasizing the need to measure the implementation of oversight. Mr. Ban spoke about recent achievements with regards to oversight at the UN, including the establishment of the Ethics Office and the establishment of compacts between the Secretary-General and senior managers. Other achievements include the adoption of International Public Sector Accounting Standards, the establishment of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee (IAAC) and the availability of OIOS reports to Member States. Mr. Ban concluded by pointing to the importance of utilizing the organization’s resources responsibly and of deepening the culture of accountability, transparency and efficiency in the future.

**Mrs. Inga-Britt Ahlenius**, Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, followed with her remarks. She spoke about the importance of trust and how it results from transparency and efficiency throughout the organization. While noting that the UN is an extremely complex organization, Mrs. Ahlenius pointed out the General Assembly’s emphasis on greater transparency. Lastly, Mrs. Ahlenius stated that, regardless of the tension caused by internal oversight, weak oversight can be a serious challenge for the organization.

**Ms. Angela Kane**, Under-Secretary-General for Management, stated that coordination has been a problem in the past between the independent oversight bodies of the UN: OIOS, the

Joint Inspection Unit and the IAAC. Given that OIOS produces around 2,000 recommendations per year for various bodies within the UN system, Mrs. Kane provided the following suggestions: recommendations of high quality, constructive recommendations for positive change, efficient auditing recommendations, a focus on high risk recommendations and regular assessment of past recommendations. She concluded by saluting the steps OIOS has taken in the past fifteen years.

Noting that challenges at the UN go far beyond those faced by regular organizations, **Ms. Susanna Malcorra**, Under-Secretary-General for Field Support, put emphasis on the need to work within the current accountability framework. This need applies to the system as a whole, including its management and oversight bodies. Ms. Malcorra also pointed out the need to strengthen the accountability framework to better include Member States. Also, oversight bodies need to recognize the risk context of the organization in order for resources to be maximized. Lastly, Ms. Malcorra noted the need for management to recognize and understand the importance of the organization's resources for effective cooperation to occur.

**Mr. Jules Muis**, former Director General of the Internal Audit Service of the European Commission and former Vice President and Controller of the World Bank, stated that keeping the momentum of past accomplishments will be a daunting task for OIOS. **Mr. David Walker**, Chairman of the IAAC, responded by stating that with challenges come future opportunities. For example, OIOS must show how valuable its functions are for the UN, and how management must cooperate with the work of OIOS. To ensure effective outcomes, OIOS must have genuine operational independence, providing the ability to determine its own final reports and to constructively engage with the Secretary-General and the General Assembly. With regards to transparency, Mr. Walker stated that a difference exists between making reports available to Member States upon request and making them available to the public.

The moderated question and answer session and discussion covered a variety of topics. Highlights include a suggestion from Ms. Kane for OIOS to combine recommendations so that they can be constructed in a more positive way, as some recommendations only assess the utility of past recommendations, in addition to notifying managers of the risk they carry. Ms. Malcorra claimed that the attitude of Permanent Missions is that management tends to have a passive or a negative attitude towards oversight, thus, making critical the need for active engagement on the

part of managers. Mr. Walker noted that partnerships between various entities imply coordinated effort that includes well-written and transparent protocols. Regarding this coordinated effort, Mr. Muis stressed the need for synergy between oversight bodies through the sharing of base information. Lastly, Mrs. Ahlenius focused on transparency, or public access to documents within the UN, noting that confidentiality feeds mistrust.

Report written by Ravi Singh.

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