



## INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

### REPORT 2015/096

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Audit of the recruitment of national staff in the United Nations Mission in Liberia

Overall results relating to the recruitment of national staff in the United Nations Mission in Liberia were initially assessed as partially satisfactory. Implementation of five important recommendations remains in progress

FINAL OVERALL RATING: PARTIALLY SATISFACTORY

16 September 2015  
Assignment No. AP2014/626/06

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# AUDIT REPORT

## Audit of the recruitment of national staff in the United Nations Mission in Liberia

### I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the recruitment of national staff in the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).
2. In accordance with its mandate, OIOS provides assurance and advice on the adequacy and effectiveness of the United Nations internal control system, the primary objectives of which are to ensure (a) efficient and effective operations; (b) accurate financial and operational reporting; (c) safeguarding of assets; and (d) compliance with mandates, regulations and rules.
3. The Under-Secretary-General of the Department of Field Support (DFS) delegated the authority to recruit national staff to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for UNMIL, who in turn delegated it to the Director of Mission Support. The Director of Mission Support sub-delegated this authority to the Chief Human Resources Officer.
4. The UNMIL Human Resources Section was responsible for anticipating, identifying and meeting the civilian personnel requirements of the Mission and ensuring their efficient deployment, management, administration and separation. The Section was headed by the Chief Human Resources Officer at the P-5 level and supported by 20 international and 16 national staff.
5. The UNMIL budgets for national staff in fiscal years 2013/14 and 2014/15 were \$17 million and \$17.5 million, respectively. The approved posts for these fiscal years were 1,064 and 954. As at 31 March 2015, UNMIL had 860 national staff, including 67 national staff recruited during the audit period.
6. Comments provided by UNMIL are incorporated in italics.

### II. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

7. The audit was conducted to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of UNMIL governance, risk management and control processes in providing reasonable assurance regarding the **effective management of the recruitment of national staff in UNMIL**.
8. The audit was included in the 2014 risk-based work plan of OIOS because of the operational risks relating to the recruitment of national staff.
9. The key control tested for the audit was regulatory framework. For the purpose of this audit, OIOS defined this key control as the one that provides reasonable assurance that policies and procedures: (a) exist to guide the recruitment process of national staff in UNMIL; (b) are implemented consistently; and (c) ensure the reliability and integrity of financial and operational information.
10. The key control was assessed for the control objectives shown in Table 1. One control objective shown in Table 1 as “Not assessed” was not relevant to the scope defined for this audit.

11. OIOS started the audit in July 2014 but suspended it one month later due to the outbreak of the Ebola virus. The audit was resumed in April 2015 and completed in June 2015. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2014 to 31 March 2015.

12. OIOS conducted an activity-level risk assessment to identify and assess specific risk exposures, and to confirm the relevance of the selected key control in mitigating associated risks. Through interviews and analytical reviews, OIOS assessed the existence and adequacy of internal controls and conducted necessary tests to determine their effectiveness.

### III. AUDIT RESULTS

13. The UNMIL governance, risk management and control processes examined were initially assessed as **partially satisfactory**<sup>1</sup> in providing reasonable assurance regarding the **effective management of the recruitment of national staff in UNMIL**. OIOS made five recommendations to address the issues identified. The UNMIL Human Resources Section managed the recruitment strategy and vacancies in coordination with the respective sections/units for which the posts had been approved, and adequately conducted medical checks to ascertain fitness of selected candidates. However, to further improve the recruitment process, UNMIL needed to: (a) establish a Mission Review Panel for the recruitment of national staff; (b) ensure that staff participating in interviews attended the competency-based interviewing course; (c) ensure all recruitment cases were properly documented; (d) take action to avoid delays in notifying candidates of their selection; and (e) verify academic credentials of selected candidates.

14. The initial overall rating was based on the assessment of key control presented in Table 1. The final overall rating is **partially satisfactory** as implementation of five important recommendations remains in progress.

**Table 1: Assessment of key control**

Business objective	Key control	Control objectives			
		Efficient and effective operations	Accurate financial and operational reporting	Safeguarding of assets	Compliance with mandates, regulations and rules
<b>Effective management of the recruitment of national staff in UNMIL</b>	Regulatory framework	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory	Not assessed	Partially satisfactory
<b>FINAL OVERALL RATING: PARTIALLY SATISFACTORY</b>					

<sup>1</sup> A rating of “**partially satisfactory**” means that important (but not critical or pervasive) deficiencies exist in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

## Regulatory framework

### A Mission Review Panel was not established to oversee the recruitment process

15. The DFS guidelines for the selection of locally recruited staff require shortlisted candidates to be assessed to ensure that technical requirements are met. It also requires UNMIL to establish a Mission Review Panel to oversee the recruitment process. Interview panel members are required to undergo training in competency-based selection and interviewing skills.

16. A review of 30 of the 67 recruitment cases completed in the audit period indicated that UNMIL did not establish a Mission Review Panel as senior management was of the opinion it could hold up the recruitment process. Also, interview panel members in 21 of the 30 recruitment cases had not attended the mandatory competency-based interview training as the hiring managers were unaware that it was a prerequisite for interview panel members.

17. The lack of a formal review panel to oversee the national recruitment process and properly trained interviewers carrying out evaluations increased the risk of inconsistency in the recruitment processes impacting on the effectiveness and credibility of the recruitment process.

**(1) UNMIL should establish a Mission Review Panel or similar central review body to ensure hiring managers' proposals for selection of applicants are properly supported and justified.**

*UNMIL accepted recommendation 1 and stated that it would establish a review panel by 31 October 2015. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence of the establishment of a review panel.*

**(2) UNMIL should arrange for staff involved in interviews to attend competency-based interview techniques to ensure adequate and comprehensive evaluations are conducted.**

*UNMIL accepted recommendation 2 and stated that it would appoint interview focal points and alternates for every section/unit and ensure they undergo the competency-based interview training course. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence that interview panel members have taken the competency-based interviewing training course.*

### Improvements were needed in the documentation of recruitment actions and decisions

18. The DFS guidelines for the selection of locally recruited staff require: (a) UNMIL to maintain case files with complete records of all recruitment activities and related documents such as shortlisted applicants and reference checks; and (b) the Chief Human Resources Officer to sign the record of evaluation of applicants, which the hiring manager is required to prepare to document the results of the assessment conducted.

19. A review of 30 of the 67 case files of national staff recruited during the audit period indicated that 12 files did not include all of the required documents, such as the shortlisted candidates, the vacancy announcement, a copy of reference check and medical clearance certificate. The Chief Human Resources Officer also did not sign the comparative evaluation worksheets for 8 of the 30 cases reviewed to confirm that the process followed was competitive, transparent and documented.

20. The above was attributed to the lack of capacity in the Human Resources Section and the need for further training of staff on the management of files and record keeping.

21. Not retaining adequate documentation and records increased the risk of hiring managers selecting candidates that did not meet required qualifications and work experience to effectively carry out the functions of advertised posts.

**(3) UNMIL should implement an action plan to: (a) ensure adequate capacity in the Human Resources Section; (b) provide adequate supervision and training for staff involved in keeping records of recruitment activities; and (c) ensure that comparative evaluation worksheets are approved by the Chief Human Resources Officer.**

*UNMIL accepted recommendation 3 and stated that it would ensure adequate capacity in the Human Resources Section, and supervise and train staff involved in recruitment recordkeeping and the approval of the comparative evaluation worksheets. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence of adequate capacity in the Human Resources Section, training of staff involved in recruitment recordkeeping and implementation of a mechanism to ensure comparative evaluation sheets are always approved.*

Some candidates were not notified of selection decisions in a timely manner

22. The DFS guidelines for the selection of locally recruited staff require the Chief Human Resources Officer to inform selected candidates within 14 days of the decision.

23. A review of 30 of the 67 recruitment cases completed during the audit period indicated that four candidates were notified within 14 days. The remaining 26 were notified on average 39 days after the recruitment decision was made. This was because the Mission had not established a system to monitor the recruitment process benchmarks. Delays in notifying successful candidates meant that their recruitment would also be delayed.

**(4) UNMIL should establish a mechanism to monitor progress towards achieving recruitment benchmarks to enhance the efficiency of the national staff recruitment process.**

*UNMIL accepted recommendation 4 and stated that the recruitment process would be strengthened to include a monitoring mechanism. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of evidence of implementation of the recruitment monitoring mechanism.*

Verification of academic credentials was not adequately done

24. The DFS guidelines on selection of locally recruited staff require that medical, reference and background checks for all external candidates are conducted.

25. A review of 30 of the 67 recruitment cases completed during the audit period indicated that UNMIL obtained confirmation letters from former employers of candidates and conducted medical checks to ascertain fitness of the selected candidates before on-boarding. The medical fitness certificates from the UNMIL Medical Section were filed in the individual recruitment files.

26. However, UNMIL did not obtain confirmation of academic qualifications of all selected candidates directly from educational institutions. This was because the Human Resources Section had not implemented a mechanism to properly supervise and review the adequacy and completeness of

background checks to ensure academic qualifications were obtained and verified. As a result, there was an increased risk that staff selected for positions did not have the requisite academic qualifications.

**(5) UNMIL should implement a mechanism to supervise the recruitment process and review the adequacy and completeness of background checks to ensure academic qualifications of selected candidates are obtained and verified.**

*UNMIL accepted recommendation 5 and stated that reference checks would be conducted with existing educational institutions in Liberia. Recommendation 5 remains open pending receipt of evidence that direct reference checks with educational institutions have been implemented.*

#### **IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

27. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of UNMIL for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

(Signed) David Kanja  
Acting Head, Office of Internal Oversight Services

## STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

## Audit of the recruitment of national staff in the United Nations Mission in Liberia

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	C/ O <sup>3</sup>	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date <sup>4</sup>
1	UNMIL should establish a Mission Review Panel or similar central review body to ensure hiring managers' proposals for selection of applicants are properly supported and justified.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of the establishment of a review panel.	31 October 2015
2	UNMIL should arrange for staff involved in interviews to attend competency-based interview techniques to ensure adequate and comprehensive evaluations are conducted.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that interview panel members have taken the competency-based interviewing training course.	31 March 2016
3	UNMIL should implement an action plan to: (a) ensure adequate capacity in the Human Resources Section; (b) provide adequate supervision and training for staff involved in keeping records of recruitment activities; and (c) ensure that comparative evaluation worksheets are approved by the Chief Human Resources Officer.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of adequate capacity in the Human Resources Section, training of staff involved in recruitment recordkeeping and implementation of a mechanism to ensure comparative evaluation sheets are always approved.	31 March 2016
4	UNMIL should establish a mechanism to monitor progress towards achieving recruitment benchmarks to enhance the efficiency of the national staff recruitment process.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of the implementation of the recruitment monitoring mechanism.	31 March 2016
5	UNMIL should implement a mechanism to supervise the recruitment process and review the adequacy and completeness of background checks to ensure academic qualifications of selected candidates are obtained and verified.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that direct reference checks with educational institutions have been implemented.	31 March 2016

<sup>1</sup> Critical recommendations address critical and/or pervasive deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided with regard to the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

<sup>2</sup> Important recommendations address important (but not critical or pervasive) deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

<sup>3</sup> C = closed, O = open

<sup>4</sup> Date provided by UNMIL.



# **APPENDIX I**

## **Management Response**

**United Nations**  
MISSION IN LIBERIA



**Nations Unies**  
MISSION AU LIBERIA

**U N M I L**

*Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General  
And Coordinator of United Nations Operations in Liberia*

Date: 11 September 2015

To: Ms. Eleanor T. Burns, Director  
Internal Audit Division, OIOS

From: Farid Zarif  
SRSG, United Nations Mission in Liberia

Subject: Assignment No. AP2014/626/06 – UNMIL’s response to the draft report on the audit of the recruitment of national staff at the United Nations Mission in Liberia

Thank you for providing us with the opportunity to comment on the above-referenced audit.

Please see the comments of the Mission to the audit in the attached matrix, as requested in your memorandum dated 1 September 2015.

Kind regards.

## Management Response

## Audit of the recruitment of national staff in the United Nations Mission in Liberia

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNMIL should establish a Mission Review Panel or similar central review body to ensure hiring managers proposals for selection of applicants are properly supported and justified.	Important	Yes	Director of Mission Support	Two months from Mission's receipt of report.	UNMIL will establish a review panel by 31 October 2015.
2	UNMIL should arrange for staff involved in interviews to attend competency-based interview techniques to ensure adequate and comprehensive evaluations are conducted.	Important	Yes	Director of Mission Support	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2016 (financial year)	UNMIL will appoint interview focal points and alternates for every section/unit and ensure that staff involved in interviews complete competency-based interview training courses before their participation in interview panels.
3	UNMIL should implement an action plan to: (a) ensure adequate capacity in the Human Resources Section; (b) provide adequate supervision and training for staff involved in keeping records of recruitment activities; and (c) ensure that comparative evaluation worksheets are approved by the Chief Human Resources Officer.	Important	Yes	Human Resources	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2016 (financial year)	UNMIL will ensure (a) adequate capacity in the Human Resources Section; (b) adequate supervision and training for staff involved in keeping records of recruitment activities; and (c) that comparative evaluation worksheets are approved by the Chief Human Resources Officer.
4	UNMIL should establish a mechanism to monitor progress towards achieving recruitment benchmarks to enhance the efficiency of the national staff recruitment process.	Important	Yes	Human Resources	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2016 (financial year)	UNMIL will strengthen the recruitment process to include a monitoring mechanism related to the achievement of recruitment benchmarks and to enhance the efficiency of the national recruitment process.

<sup>1</sup> Critical recommendations address critical and/or pervasive deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided with regard to the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

<sup>2</sup> Important recommendations address important (but not critical or pervasive) deficiencies in governance, risk management or control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

## Management Response

## Audit of the recruitment of national staff in the United Nations Mission in Liberia

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
5	UNMIL should implement a mechanism to supervise the recruitment process and review the adequacy and completeness of background checks to ensure academic qualifications of selected candidates are obtained and verified.	Important	Yes	Human Resources	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2016 (financial year)	UNMIL will conduct reference checks with existing educational institutions in Liberia.