



## INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

### REPORT 2017/004

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Audit of Office of the United Nations  
High Commissioner for Human Rights  
support to the human rights treaty  
bodies

There was a need to consolidate and  
document a comprehensive implementation  
strategy for the Capacity Building  
Programme and strengthen the management  
of travel and grants under the Optional  
Protocol to the Convention against Torture

27 February 2017  
Assignment No. AE2016/330/01

# **Audit of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights support to the human rights treaty bodies**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the management of support to the human rights treaty bodies. The audit covered the period from January 2014 to October 2016 and included a review of programme management, travel and grants.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) provided induction training to new members of the treaty bodies' committees and facilitated the harmonization of working methods of the committees. However, there was a need to consolidate and document the implementation strategy for the Capacity Building Programme which is part of General Assembly resolution 68/268 aimed at strengthening the functioning of the human rights treaty bodies. There was also a need to strengthen the management of travel of treaty bodies' members and grants under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OP-CAT).

OIOS made five recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, OHCHR needed to:

- Consolidate and document the implementation strategy for the Treaty Body System Capacity Building Programme, including coordination arrangements between the OHCHR Divisions involved in implementing the programme.
- Prioritize the development of the new petitions database.
- Assess the Human Rights Treaties Branch staff development needs and develop an appropriate training programme.
- Ensure that the members of treaty bodies and their personal assistants are briefed and regularly reminded of the need to comply with travel and security requirements; and revise the Experts Administrative Arrangements Note to address the changes introduced with the implementation of Umoja.
- Strengthen the arrangements for managing and monitoring the grants issued under OP-CAT.

OHCHR accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them.

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# Audit of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights support to the human rights treaty bodies

## I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) support to the human rights treaty bodies.

2. The Human Rights Treaties Branch (HRTB) of OHCHR is responsible for supporting the work of the human rights treaty bodies. There were 10 treaty bodies comprising 172 independent experts mandated to monitor the implementation of the treaties.

3. HRTB was also responsible for: (a) continuously updating the Universal Human Rights Index (UHRI) database which provided country-specific human rights information; (b) managing the Special Fund under the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OP-CAT); (c) promoting the continued harmonization of the work of the treaty bodies through annual meetings of treaty bodies Chairpersons; and (d) managing the United Nations Torture Fund and the United Nations Slavery Fund.

4. HRTB was headed by a chief at D-1 level and supported by 98 staff. The Chief reported to the Head of the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanism Division (CTMD) who reported to the Deputy High Commissioner. The actual expenditure of HRTB for the 2014-2015 biennium was \$31 million of which \$6 million was funded by voluntary contributions and the rest was funded by the regular budget. While the treaty bodies' committee members did not receive a salary for their work, their travel and stay to participate in the committees' sessions and the costs of the annual meeting of Chairpersons were covered by the OHCHR "Policymaking Organs" budget. The actual expenditure towards the committee members' travel and Chairpersons' annual meetings for 2014-2015 was approximately \$15 million.

5. Following the General Assembly resolution 68/268 on the strengthening of the human rights treaty body system, regular budget funds in the amount of \$9.8 million were reallocated from conference services to OHCHR to support the treaty body system. Table 1 shows the allocation of the budget to various sections of OHCHR.

**Table 1: Allocation of regular budget for strengthening of the treaty bodies system**

Activities	HRTB	Programme Support & Management Services (PSMS)	Field Presences (FOTCD)	Treaty Bodies-Committees	Total (\$US)
Capacity Building programme	1,706,190	-	1,800,810	-	3,507,000
Additional meetings' travel costs and Daily Subsistence Allowance	-	-	-	1,689,600	1,689,600
General Temporary Assistance for Treaty Bodies additional meetings – Geneva	596,000	-	-	-	596,000
Equipment for new posts	-	35,000	-	-	35,000
Staffing support	4,027,600	-	-	-	4,027,600
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,329,790</b>	<b>35,000</b>	<b>1,800,810</b>	<b>1,689,600</b>	<b>9,855,200</b>

Source: OHCHR Finance

6. Comments provided by OHCHR are incorporated in italics.

## **II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

7. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the management of OHCHR support to human rights treaty bodies.

8. This audit was included in the OIOS 2016 risk-based work plan for OHCHR due to the risk that significant expansion in the activities of the treaty bodies might not be supported by adequate capacity, operational arrangements and tools.

9. OIOS conducted this audit from July to October 2016. The audit covered the period from January 2014 to October 2016. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks in OHCHR support to treaty body system, which included programme management, travel and grants under OP-CAT.

10. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews with key personnel, (b) review of relevant documentation, (c) analytical review of data, (d) review of a sample of the grants.

## **III. OVERALL CONCLUSION**

11. OHCHR provided induction training to new members of the treaty bodies' committees and facilitated the harmonization of working methods of the committees. However, OHCHR needed to: (i) document its implementation strategy for the Treaty Body System Capacity Building Programme, including coordination arrangements between the OHCHR Divisions involved in implementing the programme; and (ii) prioritize the development of the new Petitions Database to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in processing petitions. There was also a need for HRTB to assess its staff development needs and develop a training programme. Further, arrangements for managing the committee members' travel and OP-CAT grants needed to be strengthened.

## **IV. AUDIT RESULTS**

### **A. Programme management**

#### Need to consolidate and document the implementation strategy for the Capacity Building Programme

12. The OHCHR Treaty Body System Capacity Building Programme (hereafter referred to as "the programme") was established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 68/268. Its main objectives are: (a) promoting the ratification of treaties; (b) facilitating national capacity building; (c) enabling timely report submission; (d) encouraging the use of the treaty bodies database by state parties and other stakeholders; and (e) strengthening coordination with United Nations Country Teams. It is the first programme of its kind where OHCHR, through its regional offices, supports state parties in building the capacity to implement their treaty obligations. The programme was allocated an annual budget of \$4.5 million from the regular budget.

13. The programme covered three OHCHR divisions including CTMD, the Field Operations and Technical Cooperation Division (FOTCD) and the Thematic Engagement, Special Procedures and Right to Development Division (TESPRDD). OHCHR had a number of achievements to its credit as a result of

the programme, including the development of a study and practical guide on ‘National Mechanisms for Reporting and Follow-up’, and sub-regional train-the-trainers events for state officials from Caribbean/English-speaking countries. In addition, national level activities were organized in over 40 countries to enhance the capacity of states and other stakeholders.

14. In view of the size of the programme and the fact that it involved more than one OHCHR Division, there was need for a comprehensive strategy which would also address the distribution of responsibilities and coordination between the Treaty Branch, FOTCD and TESPDD. HRTB stated that it has a strategy for the programme but it was recorded in different documents. OIOS is of the view that a clearly documented consolidated strategy is required to help ensure a holistic approach towards capacity building efforts, and to assure that no important aspects are missed.

**(1) OHCHR should consolidate and document its implementation strategy for the Treaty Body System Capacity Building Programme, including coordination arrangements between the OHCHR Divisions involved in implementing the programme.**

*OHCHR accepted recommendation 1 and stated that it will consolidate and document its implementation strategy for the Treaty Body System Capacity Building Programme by the end of 2017. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of the consolidated implementation strategy for the Capacity Building Programme.*

#### Need to prioritize the development of the new petitions database

15. The first report of the Secretary-General (A/71/118) on the implementation of resolution 68/268 prepared in July 2016 indicated that there was a significant increase in individual communications (petitions) submitted to the Committees. For instance, the number of urgent actions regarding disappeared persons registered by the Committee on Enforced Disappearances increased from 5 in 2013 to 211 in 2015. Ten Human Rights Officers in the Petitions and Inquiries Section screened and analyzed approximately 10,000 pieces of correspondence per year. The database used to keep a record of the petitions and actions taken on them was obsolete and outdated and unable to generate the necessary statistics or facilitate case-file management. Currently, information on the amount and types of incoming petitions/correspondence was maintained in a manually compiled Excel sheet. It was also not possible for managers to reassign a group of cases (along with their pending tasks) from one case officer to another when needed.

16. OHCHR recruited an external consultant to work on developing a new database which is expected to be operational by the end of 2017. However, this activity was not included in the HRTB work plan. As a result, the resources needed to establish the database development (approximately \$32,000) were not included in the 2017 cost plan. OIOS is of the view that taking into account the objective to strengthen the treaty body system, OHCHR should prioritize the development of the new database to increase efficiency and effectiveness in processing of petitions/communications. The overall individual communications backlog increased by 32 per cent from 2013 to 2015 according to the Secretary-General’s report A/71/118. Inefficiencies or delays in review of individual petitions/communications by the treaty bodies could delay or deny justice to victims of human rights violations.

**(2) OHCHR should prioritize the development of the new petitions database to enable the Petitions and Inquiries Section to conduct its activities efficiently and effectively.**

*OHCHR accepted recommendation 2 and stated that a consultant was recruited in 2016 to develop a new petition database after which the database was partially developed. The consultant will be*

*recruited for 6 additional months to complete the assignment. The new database is expected to be launched as of September 2017. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence that the new petition database has been operationalized.*

Need to assess staff training needs and develop a training plan for effective programme delivery

17. One of the OHCHR goals for 2014-2017 was for staff to have necessary competencies and skills to effectively implement programmes. Citing lack of resources, HRTB had not conducted a staff training needs assessment to assess gaps in skills required to effectively support the treaty body committees. In May 2016, OHCHR merged HRTB, the Human Rights Council Branch and the Universal Periodic Review Branch into the new Division – CTMD. The objectives of establishing the new Division included workload sharing across the branches to enhance collaboration and to gain more synergies and efficiency. Since each branch has its distinct areas of work, a training programme based on needs assessment is necessary for identification of each branch’s strengths and gaps in capacity. For instance, harmonization of working methods for staff supporting the 10 treaty body committees is an area that could be addressed in the training plan.

**(3) The OHCHR Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanism Division should assess staff development needs and develop an appropriate training programme.**

*OHCHR accepted recommendation 3 and stated that this recommendation will need coordination within CTMD. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence that staff development needs for CTMD have been assessed and a training programme has been developed.*

## **B. Travel management**

Need to ensure compliance with travel and security requirements

18. The OHCHR induction training to the members of the treaty body committees was designed to ensure that the members are familiar with all important issues including travel administrative procedures and safety and security training requirements. OHCHR provided induction training to new committee members and facilitated travel arrangements for members participating in the committees’ sessions. OIOS review of travel management noted the following:

- a) Personal assistants of the members of the Committee on the Right of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) were not submitting travel claims to OHCHR in a timely manner as required. The delays ranged from two to seven months after completion of the travel. Thirty two out of 40 outstanding travel claims totaling \$158,000 related to personal assistants of CRPD. These delays imposed an administrative burden on OHCHR due to the follow up work that had to be done to settle the claims. OHCHR attributed the delays to the large turnover of personal assistants which led to the new incumbents being not well acquainted with the need to submit supporting documents for the settlement of expense reports. The assistants are required to submit boarding passes as well as hotel bills to prove that they had separate rooms since the daily subsistence allowance is reduced by 50 per cent if a committee member and the personal assistant share a room.
- b) Committee members travelling on behalf of United Nations to hardship locations did not complete the “Advanced Security in the Field” training. For instance, two committee members who went on field missions on behalf of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture did not have a valid security training certificate despite multiple reminders from OHCHR staff. Failure to complete security training could have potentially serious consequences.

19. OHCHR indicated that staff from the Travel Unit and the Security Section regularly provided briefings to new members of the committees where the importance of security training was highlighted. The Administrative Arrangements Note distributed to experts also included a section on security informing experts of the need to comply with mandatory security requirements. OIOS noted that the Administrative Arrangement Note needed to be updated to reflect the changes in roles and responsibilities and new mechanism for security clearance following implementation of Umoja. Further, in view of the high turnover, there was need to ensure that the personal assistants of members of CRPD were briefed and reminded of the travel and security requirements regularly.

**(4) OHCHR should: (a) ensure that the members of treaty bodies and their personal assistants are briefed and regularly reminded of the need to comply with travel and security requirements; and (b) revise the Experts Administrative Arrangements Note to address the changes introduced with the implementation of Umoja.**

*OHCHR accepted recommendation 4 and stated that: (a) it will ensure that the members of treaty bodies and their assistants are briefed on the importance of complying with travel and security requirements. In addition, treaty body members will continue to be briefed by Travel Unit during their induction course; and (b) the Administrative Arrangements Note is currently under review and will be finalized during February 2017. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of: (a) a plan of action for briefing and regularly reminding members of treaty bodies and their assistants to comply with travel and security requirements; and (b) the updated Experts Administrative Arrangements Note.*

### **C. Grants management**

#### Need to strengthen the arrangements for managing the grants issued under OP-CAT

20. The Special Fund of OP-CAT supports projects that are implementing recommendations of the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture (one of the 10 treaty bodies). The Fund was established in 2011 pursuant to Article 26 of OP-CAT. From 2014 to 2016, 36 grants totalling \$985,304 were awarded for the implementation of OP-CAT recommendations in 11 countries worldwide.

21. The OHCHR Grants Committee reviewed applications for grants. The committee was composed of OHCHR staff from different divisions. OIOS reviewed seven grants and noted the following:

- a) There were gaps in the project planning information provided to the Grants Committee for review, which may have led to delays in the review process. Relevant information that could be foreseen and provided upfront had to be requested by the Grant Committee during its meetings. For instance, details on the project financial auditor, training and questions related to the outcomes of the workshops were not provided upfront.
- b) In three cases, grant activities had started almost one month before the signing of the grant agreements by both parties, which was contrary to established requirements.
- c) The majority of the grant activities were related to training, workshops, strengthening capacity building and raising awareness of relevant actors such as National Preventive Mechanisms, local authorities, law enforcement, and officials of the judiciary. It was difficult to assess whether the objectives of these grant activities were met since there were no clear performance metrics in the project evaluation forms.



d) In four cases, the external auditor submitted the audit reports two to six months after the deadline.

22. The deficiencies noted showed the need to improve the monitoring and management of grants. HRTB indicated that the fund was established without any dedicated staffing resources to manage and oversee these activities. HRTB added that the fund's reserves of \$227,000 as at June 2016 will likely be depleted by the end of 2017. Since February 2016, OHCHR solicited assistance from a working group established by the Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture to provide guidance on the strategic direction of the fund, selection, monitoring and evaluation of OP-CAT projects and participation in fundraising. OIOS is of the view that the funding challenges underscore the need to ensure the grants issued are managed efficiently and that their impact can be demonstrated. An OHCHR taskforce was looking overall at how all OHCHR trust funds could best be supported. The review was ongoing at the time of the audit and therefore it was still unclear as to what improvements would be made to the arrangements for managing OP-CAT grants.

**(5) OHCHR should strengthen the arrangements for managing and monitoring the grants issued under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.**

*OHCHR accepted recommendation 5 and stated that new arrangements will be finalized by the end of 2017. Recommendation 5 remains open pending receipt of the new arrangements for managing and monitoring the grants issued under OP-CAT.*

## V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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

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Director, Internal Audit Division  
Office of Internal Oversight Services

## STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

## Audit of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights support to the human rights treaty bodies

Rec. 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	OHCHR should consolidate and document its implementation strategy for the Treaty Body System Capacity Building Programme, including coordination arrangements between the OHCHR Divisions involved in implementing the programme.	Important	O	Receipt of the consolidated implementation strategy for the Capacity Building Programme.	31 December 2017
2	OHCHR should prioritize the development of the new petitions database to enable the Petitions and Inquiries Section to conduct its activities efficiently and effectively.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that the new petition database has been operationalized.	30 September 2017
3	The OHCHR Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanism Division should assess staff development needs and develop an appropriate training programme.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that staff development needs for CTMD have been assessed and a training programme developed.	31 December 2017
4	OHCHR should: (a) ensure that the members of treaty bodies and their personal assistants are briefed and regularly reminded of the need to comply with travel and security requirements; and (b) revise the Experts Administrative Arrangements Note to address the changes introduced with the implementation of Umoja.	Important	O	Receipt of: (a) a plan of action for briefing and regularly reminding members of treaty bodies and their assistants to comply with travel and security requirements; and (b) the updated Experts Administrative Arrangements Note.	31 March 2017
5	OHCHR should strengthen the arrangements for managing and monitoring the grants issued under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.	Important	O	Receipt of the new arrangements for managing and monitoring the grants issued under OP-CAT.	31 December 2017

<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 OHCHR in response to recommendations.

# **APPENDIX I**

## **Management Response**

**Management Response**  
**Audit of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights support to the human rights treaty bodies**

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	OHCHR should consolidate and document its implementation strategy for the Treaty Body System Capacity Building Programme, including coordination arrangements between the OHCHR Divisions involved in implementing the programme.	Important	YES	Chief, Capacity Building and Harmonization Section/Coordinator Capacity Building Programme, HRTB	31 December 2017	OHCHR will consolidate and document its implementation strategy for the Treaty Body System Capacity Building Programme by the end of 2017.
2	OHCHR should prioritize the development of the new petitions database to enable the Petitions and Inquiries Section to conduct its activities efficiently and effectively.	Important	YES	Chief, Petitions & Inquiries Section, HRTB	30 September 2017	A consultant was recruited in 2016 to develop a new petition database after which the database was partially developed so the recommendation is partially implemented. The consultant will be recruited for 6 additional months to complete the assignment. The new database is expected to be launched as of September 2017.
3	The OHCHR Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division should assess staff development needs and develop an appropriate training programme.	Important	YES	Chiefs of Branch and Director's Office	Ongoing/Continuous	This recommendation will need coordination within the Human Rights Council and Treaty Mechanisms Division (CTMD). Timeline for implementation: Initiate in 2017 (and continuous).

<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 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights support to the human rights treaty bodies**

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
4	OHCHR should: (a) ensure that the members of treaty bodies and their personal assistants are briefed and regularly reminded of the need to comply with travel and security requirements; and (b) revise the Experts Administrative Arrangements Note to address the changes introduced with the implementation of Umoja.	Important	YES	Chief, Travel Unit, PSMS, OHCHR	(a) Ongoing (b) 31 March 2017	(a) OHCHR will ensure that the members of treaty bodies and their assistants are briefed on the importance of complying with travel and security requirements. In addition, Treaty Body members will be continued to be briefed by Travel Unit during their induction course. (b) The Administrative Arrangements Note is currently under review and will be finalized during February, so the recommendation is already partially implemented. Timeline for the implementation of the recommendation: continuous.
5	OHCHR should strengthen the arrangements for managing and monitoring the grants issued under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture.	Important	YES	Chief, Capacity Building and Harmonization Section/Coordinator Capacity Building Programme, HRTB	31 December 2017	New arrangements will be finalized by the end of 2017.