INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2019/030

Audit of strategic communications and public information in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

The Mission needed to be more effective in delivering its strategic communications and public information programme

30 April 2019
Assignment No. AP2018/672/01

Audit of strategic communications and public information in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of strategic communications and public information in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of management of the strategic communications and public information (SCPI) programme in UNIFIL. The audit covered the period from July 2017 to November 2018 and included a review of: (a) development of communications strategy and plans; (b) coordination between the SCPI Section and other Mission components; (c) media relations and monitoring; (d) dissemination of information and outreach; (e) evaluation of programme effectiveness; (f) archiving of public information materials; and (g) management of programme resources.

UNIFIL developed a communications strategy, which had a clear overall goal and was aligned to the Mandate. Also, the SCPI Section was adequately coordinating with other Mission sections in preparing and disseminating public information. However, UNIFIL had not formally updated its Public Information Concept of Operations since 2013, some of its military public information officers (MPIOs) deployed in sectors did not have the required proficiency or professional experience in dealing with media, its updates of websites and some social media platforms were not regular, and its mechanism for analyzing feedback from various communication activities was not systematically documented.

OIOS made seven recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, UNIFIL needed to:

- Review and regularly update the Public Information Concept of Operations and ensure that it incorporates communication strategies for each of the Mission's mandated areas;
- Improve the development of annual work plans for strategic communication and public information by incorporating specific, measurable and timebound indicators of achievement to monitor implementation of activities and assess their impact;
- Provide feedback to the Office of Military Affairs on the minimum skills and capacity it requires of MPIOs to ensure they have the required capability in strategic communications;
- Engage with and hold accountable personnel who do not comply with Mission rules and procedures for dealing with the media;
- Update websites and social media platforms regularly;
- Enhance its mechanism for analyzing feedback on communications activities; and
- Ensure budget proposals only reflect actual requirements for contracted services.

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

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Audit of strategic communications and public information in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

I.   BACKGROUND

1.   The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of strategic communications and public information in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL).

2.   UNIFIL's Strategic Communications and Public Information (SCPI) Section provides coverage of the Mission's activities in local, regional and international media to promote improved understanding of UNIFIL's mandate and activities. The Section is responsible for developing and delivering the Mission's communications strategy, as well as formulating and communicating key messages, media relations and monitoring, and multimedia productions. SCPI operations are guided by policy directives from the Department of Public Information/Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support (DPI/DPKO/DFS[1]).

3.   The SCPI Section is headed by a Chief at the P-5 level, who reports to the Deputy Head of Mission and Director, Division of Political and Civil Affairs at the D-2 level. The Chief is supported by 18 civilian staff: 4 at the Professional level, 2 Field Service, 5 National Officers and 5 General Service; as well as 14 military public information officers (MPIOs). Two vacant posts were under recruitment. The approved budgets for 2017/18 and 2018/19 were $3.1 million and $3 million respectively as shown in Table 1.

Table 1
UNIFIL strategic communications and public information budget

Cost item	2017/18	2018/19
Staffing	$2 387 960	$2 447 605
Supplies and maintenance of existing equipment	20 000	18 020
Replacement of audio-visual equipment	83 634	--
Television production and broadcasting services	242 445	218 410
Radio Production and Broadcasting Services	80 000	72 070
Design Printing and Publishing services	70 117	63 170
Community outreach novelty items	80 500	72 070
Public Information Opinion Polls	71 470	64 400
Subscriptions to news services	56 885	51 260
Total	**$3 093 011**	**$3 007 005**

Source: UNIFIL approved costing sheets and funds distribution

4.   Comments provided by UNIFIL are incorporated in italics.

II.   AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

5.   The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of management of the SCPI programme in UNIFIL.

6.   This audit was included in the 2018 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the governance and operational risks related to strategic communications and public information in supporting mandate implementation.

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[1]Although these departments have been rebranded as part of ongoing reforms, the guidelines are referred to by the names of the departments when the guidelines were issued.

7.   OIOS conducted this audit from October to December 2018. The audit covered the period from July 2017 to November 2018. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risk areas in the strategic communications and public information of UNIFIL, which included: (a) development of the communications strategy and plans; (b) coordination between the SCPI Section and other Mission components; (c) media relations and monitoring; (d) dissemination of information and outreach; (e) evaluation of programme effectiveness; (f) archiving of public information materials; and (g) management of programme resources.

8.   The audit methodology included: (a) interviews of key personnel, (b) analytical reviews and tests of media products and activities; and (c) field visits to sample military positions.

9.   The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

III.   AUDIT RESULTS

<u>The communications strategy needed to be regularly updated</u>

10.   For effective programme implementation, the DPI/DPKO/DFS policy on SCPI states that the Section Chief should develop, in cooperation with other Mission components, a communication strategy that supports the peace process and mandate implementation. The strategy must be integrated with other mission strategic documents and updated regularly.

11.   In 2013, the Mission approved a communication strategy known as the Public Information Concept of Operations (PI-CONOPS). The document had a clear overall communication goal that was aligned to the mandate and UNIFIL Mission Plan. However, while the PI-CONOPS cited the need to promote the implementation of activities under the UNIFIL mandate, specific communication objectives or related activities were yet to be developed for all key mandated tasks. Further, the PI-CONOPS had not been reviewed since 2013, instead, the Mission had developed additional working documents to supplement the PI-CONOPS. These included: a communication strategy on combating sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by United Nations personnel in 2016; annual communication strategy documents in 2017 and 2018; and a strategy on Security Council resolution 2373 (2017). Requirements under Security Council resolution 2433 (2018) on gender considerations were yet to be incorporated into the strategy.

12.   While these additional documents provided useful mandate-focused operational direction, only the strategy on SEA had been formally approved by the Head of Mission. SCPI, however, stated that senior Mission management held regular discussions on the other strategies at Mission Leadership Team (MLT) and weekly meetings.

13.   Also, the PI-CONOPS and the additional working documents had not properly incorporated some of the new media products and platforms that SCPI was introducing to improve outreach to the target audience. These included: the use of podcasts, a twitter handle in Arabic and a 'Peace Bus'; increased focus on youth as per United Nations Youth 2030 strategy; and leveraging other United Nations agency arrangements for broadcast of sustainable development goals in cinemas.

14.   The above happened because the Mission had not established a formal mechanism to periodically update the PI-CONOPS. Consequently, developments affecting programme activities, including mandate renewals, though discussed with the Head of Mission and used to shape communication products, were still in draft form and not yet incorporated into the PI-CONOPS.

Need to specify indicators of achievement in annual work plans

15.   The strategic framework of the Organization requires subprogrammes to prepare work plans and identify indicators of achievement that demonstrate how the subprogrammes contribute to the achievement of expected accomplishments and objectives (ST/SGB/2018/3). MPIOs, who play a central in implementing the work plan and engaging the local population, should be trained communications professionals and the Chief of SCPI must provide guidance and additional training as required.

16.   The SCPI Section prepared annual work plans for the period under review, which were approved by the Deputy Head of Mission and Director, Division of Political and Civil Affairs. However, while the plans indicated success criteria for various activities, some of the criteria were described in broad terms such as "Good media relations are maintained, and mission activities are appropriately covered by the media …" and "Increased coverage of the successes of UNIFIL's work while amplifying shared priorities around UN Peacekeeping …", without specifying how they would be assessed. Where specific work products were indicated, the frequency, timelines, desired impact and method of assessment were not detailed. For example:

- The frequency of publication of the outreach magazine and other materials was not specified. The magazine was published every six months, whereas the results-based budget output specified four issues per year. The plan also did not detail how the magazines would be distributed, and their impact measured. Thus, feedback on the distribution of the magazines was not adequately obtained from MPIOs, who also did not maintain distribution records;
- The 2017/18 workplan required regular update of the content on the UNIFIL website. The minimum frequency of updates was, however, not specified and as a result, updates to static pages did not follow any regular pattern resulting in old or conflicting data on some web pages. Some pages were last updated in 2016 and required revision;
- Performance metrics for social and traditional media were also not specified. The Mission stated that it relied on influencers to re-disseminate social media messages but did not indicate how it would collaborate with the influencers or assess their effectiveness;
- The frequency of review of the implementation status of the plans was not determined and formal review results were not documented. SCPI stated the plans were reviewed weekly, but evidence of this could not be provided to OIOS; and
- Frequency of meetings with MPIOs was not determined, although by practice these were held monthly.

17.   In addition, while the communication strategy on SEA required, among others highlighting the United Nations zero-tolerance policy towards SEA in print, radio, web and social media, no specific message on SEA was provided in all three versions of the Al Janoub Magazine during the audit period. Instead a caption on generally expected conduct and behaviour of United Nations personnel was included in three Arabic publications and two of the three English versions. Similarly, no specific message was posted on the various social media platforms. Only the website had clear messaging. SCPI stated that the

veiled couching of messages on SEA was out of respect of the local culture, which did not openly discuss such matters and to avoid misconceptions on UNIFIL personnel.

18.   A review of MPIOs activities showed that a number of areas needed attention. For instance, capabilities of the MPIO teams at 4 out of 11 positions showed significant inconsistencies in language proficiency, equipment and professional experience. At one position, the MPIO team comprised seven qualified public information professionals, while the other three positions had teams of two or three, who had no prior experience in strategic communications or proficiency in English. The only guidance provided included job-specific pre-deployment training, hand-over from predecessors as well as monthly MPIOs coordination meetings. Although the last two Heads of Mission had reiterated concerns about MPIOs in their end of assignment reports, which according to the Mission had also been shared with the Department of Global Communications at a conference in Brindisi, there had been no improvement in the personnel deployed.

19.   The above happened because SCPI felt that some activities were difficult to measure. However, specific, measurable and timebound indicators of achievement were needed to monitor the implementation of activities and assess their impact and outcomes objectively. UNIFIL also needed to provide written feedback to the Office of Military Affairs, which is responsible for force generation, on its requirements for MPIOs. This would improve the implementation of information activities in support of the Mission's mandate.

(2)	**UNIFIL should improve the development of annual work plans for strategic communication and public information by incorporating specific, measurable and timebound indicators of achievement to monitor implementation of activities and assess their impact.**

UNIFIL accepted recommendation 2 and stated that SCPI Section already had workplans that were regularly revised based on the situation on the ground. Given that the Section operated in a very unpredictable domestic and regional environment, it was difficult to stick to one set of plans incorporating specific, measurable and timebound indicators of achievement. Nonetheless, various subsections within SCPI Section would set reasonable and timebound targets for achievements based on the Mission's priorities as underpinned by the relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions (1701, 2373 and 2433). This would also include assessment and monitoring of impact of SCPI's work. Recommendation 2 remains open pending implementation of the above measures.

(3)	**UNIFIL should provide feedback to the Office of Military Affairs on the minimum skills and capacity it requires of military public information officers to ensure that troop-contributing countries deploy personnel with the required capability.**

UNIFIL accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the Mission had at various fora raised concerns on the capability gaps of deployed MPIOs, including in the end of tour notes of the last two former Heads of Mission. Nonetheless, UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander would send a letter, together with the standard terms of reference for MPIOs, detailing gaps in their qualifications and job requirements. This issue was also discussed during the meeting of Chiefs of SCPI in April 2019 in Brindisi. The Mission was also in the process of preparing with UNHQ, a new Strategic Communications Policy to include a separate paragraph highlighting the required skills of MPIOs. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence of these actions.

B.   Implementation of the SCPI programme

<u>Coordination with other Mission components was adequate</u>

20.   To advise senior leadership on strategic communications and work with other Mission components as part of the overall mission communications strategy, the Chief of SCPI or his designate regularly attended the meetings of the MLT and Crisis Management Team, and chaired the Board Executive Committee of the Integrated Outreach Operations Coordination (IOOC). The Board Executive Committee was responsible for implementing the IOOC programme, and it developed key messages, talking points and guidelines to be used for face-to-face communications and during sensitive commemorations. The SCPI Section also worked with the Regional Conduct and Discipline Service to jointly develop the communication strategy on SEA. Information was also regularly exchanged with other Mission components such as the Security Section and Joint Mission Analysis Centre. OIOS concluded that the SCPI Section adequately coordinated with other Mission components.

<u>Issuance of press statements by MPIOs needed streamlining</u>

21.   The Mission rules and procedures for dealing with the media authorizes only the Head of Mission, the Deputy Head of Mission, the Chief of SCPI and Mission Spokesperson to deal with the media on UNIFIL issues. Other officials including MPIOs are required to obtain prior approval from the Head of Mission after consultation with the SCPI Section, before engaging the media, and only on matters over which they are responsible and have the competence.

22.   A review of four press releases issued by MPIOs during the audit period showed that they were not cleared by the SCPI Section. The press releases were also not subject to adequate quality control measures as highlighted by grammatical errors, inaccurate information on the Mission mandate or inappropriate tone. As noted in para 18 above, most of the MPIOs are not trained communications professionals, contrary to requirement. SCPI became aware of this non-compliance following publication of an unauthorized press release on a sensitive issue and thus re-issued the Head of Mission's guidelines in October 2018 as well as reminded TCC commanders of the protocols. Despite this reminder, in November 2018, a press release was issued without clearance by the SCPI Section.

23.   The above happened because Sector Headquarters MPIOs were of the view that there was a standing verbal understanding with the SCPI Section that allowed them to directly engage with the media to maintain the currency of media content and avoid lengthy approval process with Mission Headquarters. Continuing to bypass the clearance process increased the risk that conflicting, inaccurate or inappropriate information is being provided to the media and the local population, negatively impacting the Mission's reputation.

> **(4) The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander should engage with and hold accountable personnel who do not comply with Mission rules and procedures for dealing with the media, and ensure the matter is periodically discussed with Contingent Commanders at Mission Leadership Team meetings.**
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> *UNIFIL accepted recommendation 4 and stated that through the assistance of the SCPI Section, the Force Commander had constantly reminded the contingent commanders, troops and staff to ensure adherence to the UNIFIL rules and procedures for dealing with the media.* Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of evidence of these actions.

Action was taken to improve media monitoring

24.   The SCPI Section was adequately monitoring local, regional and international media around the clock and keeping Mission management informed of relevant developments, including classified and sensitive information. The information sources included local dailies; news websites; television and radio stations; news agencies, regional and international media networks, with added focus on media known for being critical towards UNIFIL or those that frequently reported on UNIFIL.

25.   However, the lists of media sources and journalists were not properly updated. For instance, the SCPI Section identified 112 media sources in six separate lists developed between 2006 and 2018, which were not regularly updated. One of the three lists of journalists was last updated in November 2016, of which three journalists, out the seven sampled, had separated from the cited networks or agencies between 2013 and 2015. This rendered their employer linked contact details invalid, limiting the opportunity to effectively disseminate information. The Mission has since updated lists of media sources and journalists; therefore, OIOS did not make a recommendation on this issue.

Dissemination of public information needed improvement

26.   To promote the Mission's mandate, timely, proactive and accurate information should be disseminated. The SCPI Section should leverage emerging technologies and delivery of high-standard multilingual content that support and demonstrate Mission activities. Also, relevant information should be disseminated timely to United Nations personnel to ensure they are aware of priorities and objectives and can accurately represent the Mission's views.

27.   The Mission's outreach activities improved during the period as messaging was done by a designated sub-committee, while the recommendations from the strategic review relating to outreach, which included placing the Military Coordination Outreach Unit in SCPI, had been implemented. Also, a review of six media reports showed that the Mission proactively responded to incidents or media reports and issued official statements in a timely manner. However, press releases were not shared with staff, but only to a select group of 55 personnel and later posted on the website. Thus, other personnel were only privy to the details in subsequent day(s) and may not be able to represent the Mission's views in the interim.

28.   Further, while the Mission used various platforms[2] and actively introduced new products in promoting the Mission's mandate, some content was not up-to-date or translated into the Arabic language of the local population. Apart from Twitter and Facebook, which were updated daily, other social media sites were not updated, especially the infographics statistics and lists of activities on the website. For instance, in March 2018, web pages showed conflicting data on the number of troops and TCCs deployed to UNIFIL, and information on TCC-funded outreach activities of $5.6 million was last updated in May 2017. Also, the Arabic UNIFIL website (42 per cent of its users are the local population) did not provide an infographics page or links to the corresponding Arabic YouTube and Twitter sites, and other social media platforms such as Soundcloud and Flickr did not have bilingual captions on content. The Mission updated some of these upon notification by OIOS, but others requiring further graphic development were still pending requiring support from the Department of Peace Operations (DPO).

29.   The above happened because the communications strategy did not comprehensively articulate a social media strategy, which resulted in non-establishment of specific objectives and performance metrics

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[2] The platforms used by the Mission in disseminating information included: social media platforms (including multilingual Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, English language Flickr, Instagram and Soundcloud), five local radio stations that air two Arabic programmes bi-weekly, three local television networks that broadcast 7 to 10 Arabic documentaries a month, multilingual bi-annual outreach magazine and website.

for social media. This issue is addressed in recommendation 2. In addition, the DPO web platform was standardized across peacekeeping and UNIFIL did not have the ability to create links from its Arabic site to corresponding social media sites. Consequently, the various communication platforms may not effectively reach the target population to ensure effective implementation of the communications strategy.

> **(5) UNIFIL should: (a) disseminate press releases to all its staff to ensure they are aware of important developments and can accurately represent the Mission's views; (b) establish a mechanism to update its websites and social media platforms regularly; and (c) in coordination with DPO, review and enhance the design of its web pages to include appropriate language and reference links to the Arabic versions of the website and social media platforms.**
>
> *UNIFIL accepted recommendation 5 and stated that press releases were now disseminated to all staff members via email. Press summaries and weekly reviews were also regularly sent to staff and posted on COSMOS. SCPI would develop a diarized checklist to facilitate scheduled updates to static web pages. As the Mission could not change the design of the UNHQ webpage, UNIFIL would coordinate with the Department of Global Communications for any required changes on the website design. SCPI Section also stated that it was short-staffed as the positions of Chief of Section and Video Producer were vacant.* Recommendation 5 remains open pending receipt of evidence of implementation of actions to improve dissemination of public information.

C.   Evaluation of programme effectiveness

Mechanism for analyzing feedback needed improvement

30.   The DPI/DPKO/DFS Policy expects evaluation procedures to be established to ensure that communications objectives are met in the most efficient manner and to inform the SCPI component on how best to tailor programmes and products to manage threats and support mission objectives. According to the DPKO/DFS Guidelines on Understanding and Integrating Local Perceptions in United Nations Peacekeeping, missions should employ multiple tools and seek the views of women and men equally, and youth, as per the 2030 Youth Strategy.

31.   The Mission employed multiple tools to evaluate programme effectiveness including a public perception survey, media monitoring and analysis, and feedback from integrated outreach operation activities. However, some improvements were needed to enhance the following areas:

(a) Public perception survey

32.   UNIFIL outsourced the conduct of semi-annual public perception surveys. While the surveys were to gain an understanding of the impact of UNIFIL's presence in the area of operations and to build and maintain good relations with the local community, they also provided some insights into the effectiveness of communication activities. On the positive side, the survey results covering the period September 2017 and July 2018 showed improved understanding of the respective responsibilities of the Lebanese Armed Force and the Mission for security, and improved assessment of the impartiality of UNIFIL and how well it was keeping the community informed about the Mission's activities. However, the survey also highlighted that:

- 97 per cent of respondents were not familiar with the outreach magazine despite 16,000 copies being printed in Arabic and distributed bi-annually (no change);

- 98 per cent were not aware of UNIFIL radio programmes despite airing of new bi-monthly programmes in eight episodes and 60 promotions through five contracted local stations (no change);
- 36 per cent and 22 per cent erroneously believed UNIFIL mandates included providing humanitarian assistance and maintaining public order, up from 35 and 16 per cent respectively; and
- Only 6 per cent of youths and 39 per cent of women were included in the survey, despite the requirement in DPKO/DFS guideline and 2030 Youth Strategy to increase coverage.

33.   SCPI felt that some of the results did not provide an accurate picture of the communications landscape and further stated that perceptions surveys were not the main determinant in defining the communications strategy. Nonetheless, to address some of the shortfalls above, the Head of Mission in September 2018 reiterated the need for due regard to local sensitivities. SCPI also undertook a self-examination, which led to revision of the terms of reference for the public perception survey to include 12 focus groups before 30 June 2019, with proportionate representation of women and youth.

   (b) Feedback from social media

34.   The SCPI Section reviewed and analyzed statistics on traffic to the Mission's website and social media sites based on country, gender and age. It also reviewed the comments but did not systematically categorize the feedback into themes or shared them with substantive sections to effectively inform the communication and other strategies. Several comments criticized the Mission's execution of its mandate, stating that the Mission was not doing enough in maritime operations, women empowerment and prevention of unauthorized weapons to Lebanon, despite development of related media products. SCPI pointed out that social media attracted extremists and haters and that comments received needed to be analyzed with caution.

   (c) Feedback from MPIOs

35.   The SCPI Section held monthly meetings with MPIOs to discuss SCPI activities. However, these meeting did not adequately leverage the opportunity to solicit feedback from MPIOs on the effectiveness of outreach activities. Views of MPIOs on the current design of the outreach magazine, frequency of its distribution and other initiatives were yet to be obtained. Also, the high level of rotation and varying 'quality' of MPIOs contributed to challenges in obtaining feedback from MPIOs.

36.   Although the SCPI Section regularly discussed the results of these feedback mechanisms at MLT, IOOC and weekly meetings, it did not systematically document the analysis of the results and the remedial action it took. Consequently, UNIFIL could not demonstrate how the analyses had been considered in shaping the communication strategy and improving audience reach.

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(6) UNIFIL should enhance its mechanism for analyzing feedback on the impact of various communications activities by systematically documenting the analysis of trends and unmet targets and ensuring that adequate consideration is given to all factors relevant to shaping the communication strategy and improving audience reach.

UNIFIL accepted recommendation 6 and stated that its target audience was a mix of a wide range of asymmetrical groups, including local, regional, international, public, TCCs and the Security Council. Therefore, the feedback received through various channels was also asymmetrical. The Mission had nevertheless successfully reached its target audience through various communication platforms, but as the communication landscape evolved, SCPI Section would make needs-based adjustments to enhance its platforms. SCPI Section would therefore, enhance its communication

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D. Archiving of public information materials

Actions taken to improve archiving of public information materials

37. Web content was archived on the DPKO Web Platform as required by the DPKO/DFS Information Management Policy; however, video, photo and radio materials, though archived on external drives and additional backup sites, were not transferred to the Global Communications Audio-visual Library, as required. Similarly, press materials were only archived on the UNIFIL intranet and website, but not transferred to the Archives and Records Management Section at Headquarters. Also, media summaries on the internet were only available from 9 December 2010 as prior archives had been lost.

38. This happened because DPI/DPKO/DFS did not provide sufficient guidance on archiving requirements until November 2018, after which SCPI commenced training of its civilian personnel. In view of the actions taken, OIOS did not make a recommendation.

E. Management of resources

Management of resources needed improvement

39. The Chief of SCPI or his/her designate is expected to monitor budgets and expenditures and ensure timely procurement of equipment and implementation of projects.

40. A review of 10 vendor contracts for broadcasting, printing services and perception surveys showed that the contracts were executed in accordance with the contract terms. However, the approved budget for these services exceeded amounts provided for in the respective contracts by approximately $113,000 in 2017/18 and $67,000 in 2018/19.

41. Further, a review of the asset replacement documents indicated inadequate tracking of purchases. In March 2018, the SCPI Section raised requisitions to replace 36 specialized equipment that had exceeded their useful life by up to eight years. However, at the time of the audit, these items had not yet been procured and the SCPI Section was not able to access the shopping carts to monitor progress. The assets to be replaced included an audio-visual equipment budgeted at $83,600, teleprompter for video production, cameras and recorders.

42. The overbudgeting for contracted services happened because unspecified market indices and handling fees were historically added to the contractual amounts despite not being paid in the past. Also, the SCPI Section was unclear on the responsibilities for budget monitoring as the budget for the concerned assets was jointly developed by SCPI and UNIFIL Field Technology Sections. Consequently, excessive budget requirements tied up funds that could have benefited other priority areas. Also, inadequate budget implementation resulted in delayed procurement and deployment of assets critical to public information activities. As a result, the Mission was not able to conduct live broadcasts of key events due to lack of appropriate equipment.

> **(7) UNIFIL should: (a) ensure budget proposals only reflect actual requirements for contracted services; and (b) clarify the responsibility of the Strategic Communications and Public**

> **Information Section budget focal point to monitor expenditures related to communications assets, including tracking of requisitions.**
>
> *UNIFIL accepted recommendation 7 and stated that the SCPI Section budget focal point should be given visibility of expenditure through implementation of a coordination and data sharing mechanism with procurement and finance partners.* Recommendation 7 remains open pending evidence of that budget proposals only reflect actual requirements for contracted services and the SCPI Section budget focal point has been given visibility of information required to monitor the Section's expenditures.

IV.   ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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

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(*Signed*) Eleanor T. Burns
Director, Internal Audit Division
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STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of strategic communications and public information in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[3]/ Important[4]	C/ O[5]	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date[6]
1	UNIFIL should implement a process to review and regularly update the Public Information Concept of Operations and ensure that it incorporates communication strategies for each of the Mission's mandated areas as well as developments affecting programme activities.	Important	O	Receipt of an updated PI-CONOPs that incorporates communication strategies for each of the Mission's mandated areas as well as developments affecting programme activities.	31 August 2020
2	UNIFIL should improve the development of annual work plans for strategic communication and public information by incorporating specific, measurable and timebound indicators of achievement to monitor implementation of activities and assess their impact.	Important	O	Receipt of enhanced annual workplans that incorporate specific, measurable and timebound indicators of achievement to monitor implementation of activities and assessment of their impact.	31 August 2020
3	UNIFIL should provide feedback to the Office of Military Affairs on the minimum skills and capacity it requires of military public information officers to ensure that troop-contributing countries deploy personnel with the required capability.	Important	O	Receipt of a revised Strategic Communication Policy that clearly highlights the main skills required of MPIOs, and evidence of formal communication to the Office of Military Affairs highlighting gaps in the capabilities of the deployed MPIOs against the standard terms of reference.	1 February 2020
4	The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander should engage with and hold accountable personnel who do not comply with Mission rules and procedures for dealing with the media, and ensure the matter is periodically discussed with Contingent Commanders at Mission Leadership Team meetings.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of periodic engagement with contingent commanders and holding accountable personnel who did not comply with Mission rules and procedures for dealing with the media.	30 September 2019

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[3] 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.

[4] 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.

[5] C = closed, O = open

[6] Date provided by UNIFIL in response to recommendations.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of strategic communications and public information in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[3]/ Important[4]	C/ O[5]	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date[6]
5	UNIFIL should: (a) disseminate press releases to all its staff to ensure they are aware of important developments and can accurately represent the Mission's views; (b) establish a mechanism to update its websites and social media platforms regularly; and (c) in coordination with DPO, review and enhance the design of its web pages to include appropriate language and reference links to the Arabic versions of the website and social media platforms.	Important	O	Part (a) Implemented. For parts (b) and (c), receipt of evidence of implementation of a mechanism to ensure regular updates to UNIFIL website, in conjunction with the Department of Global Communications, where applicable.	30 September 2019
6	UNIFIL should enhance its mechanism for analyzing feedback on the impact of various communications activities by systematically documenting the analysis of trends and unmet targets and ensuring that adequate consideration is given to all factors relevant to shaping the communication strategy and improving audience reach.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence of enhanced mechanism established for assessing and monitoring the impact of its communication activities as relevant and realistic.	30 September 2019
7	UNIFIL should: (a) ensure budget proposals only reflect actual requirements for contracted services; and (b) clarify the responsibility of the Strategic Communications and Public Information Section budget focal point to monitor expenditures related to communications assets, including tracking of requisitions.	Important	O	Receipt of evidence that budget proposals only reflect actual requirements for contracted services and the SCPI Section budget focal point has been given visibility of information required to monitor the Section's expenditures .	31 July 2019

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of strategic communications and public information in the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical[1]/ Important[2]	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNIFIL should implement a process to review and regularly update the Public Information Concept of Operations and ensure that it incorporates communication strategies for each of the Mission's mandated areas as well as developments affecting programme activities.	Important	YES	Chief SCPI	31 August 2020	SCPI will update the PIO CONOPS to include new communication platforms and Mission's communications priorities based on the political situation in the Mission area and the area of influence. This will be done after its mandate renewal.
2	UNIFIL should improve the development of annual work plans for strategic communication and public information by incorporating specific, measurable and timebound indicators of achievement to monitor implementation of activities and assess their impact.	Important	YES	Chief SCPI	31 August 2020	UNIFIL's Strategic Communication and Public Information (SCPI) section already has workplans that undergo frequent revisions based on the situation on the ground. Given that UNIFIL Strategic Communication operates in a very unpredictable domestic and regional environment, it is difficult at best to stick to "one" set of plans incorporating "specific, measurable and timebound" indicators of achievement. The achievements are already visible through a wide range messaging platforms. Nonetheless, various sub-sections with SCPI section will set reasonable and timebound targets for achievements based on the

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[1] 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.

[2] 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.

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						Mission priorities, which are essentially underpinned by the relevant UN Security Council resolutions (1701, 2373 and 2433). This will also include assessing and monitoring the impact of our work.
3	UNIFIL should provide feedback to the Office of Military Affairs on the minimum skills and capacity it requires of military public information officers to ensure that troop-contributing countries deploy personnel with the required capability.	Important	YES	Chief SCPI	1 February 2019	Please note that this has been raised frequently in the past at various fora, including in the end-of-tour notes of at least two former Heads of Mission. Even so, UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander will send a letter, together with the standard Terms of Reference for Military Public Information Officers, detailing the gaps in their qualifications and job requirements. This issue was discussed during the Meeting of Chiefs of Strategic Communications and Public Information, Brindisi - 1-5 April 2019. We are in the process of preparing with UNHQ a new Strategic Communication Policy to include a separate paragraphs on MPIOs highlighting the main skills needed.
4	The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander should engage with and hold accountable personnel who do not comply with Mission rules and procedures for dealing with the media, and ensure the matter is periodically discussed with	Important	YES	Chief SCPI will advise the HoM/FC accordingly	30 September 2019	Through the assistance of SCPI, the FC has been constantly reminding CONTICOs, the troops and the staff to adhere to UNIFIL rules and procedures for dealing with the media. SCPI will provide the

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	Contingent Commanders at Mission Leadership Team meetings.					auditors with the minutes of the meetings where this issue has been emphasized and the Rules have been distributed to the participants.
5	UNIFIL should: (a) disseminate press releases to all its staff to ensure they are aware of important developments and can accurately represent the Mission's views; (b) establish a mechanism to update its websites and social media platforms regularly; and (c) in coordination with DPO, review and enhance the design of its web pages to include appropriate language and reference links to the Arabic versions of the website and social media platforms.	Important	YES	Chief SCPI, Media Monitoring Unit and Webmaster/Social Media Specialist	30 September 2019	All public Press Releases and Statements are now disseminated to all UNIFIL staff via e-mail. All the Press Summaries and Weekly Reviews are regularly sent every day to all the UNIFIL Staff and posted in COSMOS. SCPI will develop a diarized checklist to facilitate scheduled updates to static webpages. The Mission cannot change the design of this UNHQ web page template. The Mission will coordinate with Department of Global Communications for any required changes on the design. All the reference links to the Arabic versions of the website and social media platforms are already in place. Please note that the SCPI Section is short-staffed at the moment (with the Section Chief position vacant, Video Producer leaving soon and the Webmaster on a TJO assignment in another Mission).
6	UNIFIL should enhance its mechanism for analyzing feedback on the impact of various communications activities by systematically documenting the analysis of	Important	YES	Chief SCPI & Webmaster/Social Media Specialist	30 September 2019	UNIFIL's target audiences are a mix of a wide range of asymmetrical groups (local, regional, international, the public,

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	trends and unmet targets and ensuring that adequate consideration is given to all factors relevant to shaping the communication strategy and improving audience reach.					troop-contributing countries, Security Council members etc.). Their feedback, received through various channels, are also asymmetrical. As for the audience reach, we have successfully reached our target audiences through various communication platforms. As the communication landscape evolves, we can make needs-based adjustments to enhance it. Nonetheless, SCPI will enhance its mechanism to assess and monitor the impact of our communication activities as relevant and realistic.
7	UNIFIL should: (a) ensure budget proposals only reflect actual requirements for contracted services; and (b) clarify the responsibility of the Strategic Communications and Public Information Section budget focal point to monitor expenditures related to communications assets, including tracking of requisitions.	Important	YES	Chief SCPI and SCPI Administrative Assistant	31 July 2019	SCPI budget focal point should be given visibility of expenditure through UMOJA and the implementation of a coordination and data sharing mechanism with procurement and finance partners.