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Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of recommendations from the programme evaluation of the United Nations Department of Political Affairs

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session to review the implementation of Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) recommendations three years after the Committee had decided to endorse them (see [A/37/38](#), para. 362). The present triennial review determined the extent to which three of the four recommendations emanating from the OIOS programme evaluation of the Department of Political Affairs were implemented. The Committee took note of the fourth recommendation from the evaluation but did not recommend it for endorsement by the General Assembly. It should be noted that, on 1 January 2019, pursuant to General Assembly resolution [72/199](#), the Department of Political Affairs became the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. As such, the present report will refer to the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

The 2017 evaluation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs focused on the Department's substantive support for field-based conflict prevention and resolution work and made three important recommendations. OIOS determined that all three recommendations had been implemented.

In recommendation 1, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs was requested to institutionalize its role in contributing to field-level accountability by developing an accountability framework, advocating the requirement that mission leadership compacts be completed by special envoys and special advisers and making those compacts available publicly. To implement that recommendation, the Department developed guidance and draft compacts for mission leadership covering

* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

** [E/AC.51/2020/1](#).



substantive priorities and managerial responsibilities. The guidance has been used in one mission so far and, since 2019, all field-level compacts have been made available publicly. OIOS assessed the status of that recommendation to be implemented, but urged the Department to tailor the new guidance to all missions it supported by the Department and noted that none of the publicly available leadership compacts for field-level settings included special envoys or advisers, a gap also noted by OIOS in its 2017 evaluation.

In recommendation 2, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs was requested to fill key analytical gaps in its political analysis and evaluation function. On the former, the Department carried out several training sessions and courses on topics and methodologies related to political analysis. The Department demonstrated that several of these had resulted in concrete initiatives, such as strategic assessments of missions led by the Department and a publicly available guide on e-analytics. To bolster its evaluation function, the Department recruited a Programme Management Officer to lead its evaluation efforts and revised its evaluation policy. The Department also participated in a process to harmonize knowledge management workstreams across the peace and security pillar, jointly with the Department of Peace Operations, through a Peace and Security Pillar Guidance Development and Learning Steering Committee. OIOS assessed the status of this recommendation to be implemented and encouraged the Department to ensure its evaluation and broader knowledge management functions were adequately resourced going forward.

In recommendation 3, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs was requested to strengthen Headquarters and field-level planning processes through its knowledge management and quality assurance efforts. In addition to bolstering its political analysis and evaluation function in response to recommendation 2, the Department also developed a process to implement internal recommendations and completed an independent evaluation of its strategic plan. The Department also strengthened coordination between the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and the Guidance and Learning Unit, as well as the Department's overall role in planning for new and ongoing missions. The latter included undertaking a study into the lessons learned from special political mission start-ups, providing support to the Secretary-General's mission planning directives and guiding missions in planning their strategic priorities in the context of budgeting processes. OIOS assessed the status of this recommendation to be implemented, but also noted the need for continued progress to strengthen both Headquarters and field-level planning processes in the context of the Secretary-General's peace and security and management reforms.

I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-seventh session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the evaluation of the Department of Political Affairs (E/AC.51/2017/6 and E/AC.51/2017/6/Corr.1).
2. The Committee appreciated the report and recommended that the General Assembly endorse three and take note of one of the four recommendations contained in paragraph 59 of the report of OIOS.
3. In the present triennial review, OIOS examined the status of implementation of the three endorsed recommendations contained in its evaluation report. All three were assessed to have been implemented.
4. The methodology for the triennial review included:
 - (a) A review and analysis of biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the database of the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division;
 - (b) An analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs on various issues related to the recommendations;
 - (c) Interviews conducted by telephone with Department staff.¹
5. The assessment by OIOS took into consideration the new context in which the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs is operating today, as part of the peace and security and management reforms, compared with three years ago. The Department now includes the Peacebuilding Support Office and also shares its regional divisions with the Department of Peace Operations. In addition, the reforms shifted the distribution of responsibility between Department Headquarters and its mission settings across a number of programmatic and managerial areas.
6. The report incorporates comments by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs received during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with the Department for its final comments, which are provided in the annex to the present report. OIOS expresses its appreciation for the cooperation and assistance provided by the Department in the preparation of the report.

II. Recommendations

Recommendation 1

Institutionalize role in contributing to field-level accountability

7. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

The Department, in consultation with the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, should seek to institutionalize its role in contributing to field-level accountability, by:

- Developing an accountability framework to clearly delineate roles and responsibilities of the Department (including that of the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs) in relation to those of the Executive Office and mission leadership, in contributing to field-level accountability;

¹ In addition, OIOS drew on documentation and analysis from a 2020 evaluation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs by the Inspection and Evaluation Division.

- Advocating the requirement that compacts be completed by Special Envoys and Special Advisers; and
- Making mission leadership compacts publicly available.

Indicators of achievement: Framework developed, implemented and monitored, leading to enhanced Department role in strengthening mission accountability; compact requirement made universal; compacts made publicly available

8. In response to recommendation 1, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs developed guidance for mission leadership, including for special representatives of the Secretary-General and special envoys, covering substantive priorities and managerial responsibilities. The guidance was first used in June 2019 in Somalia, where it was sent to the newly appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Somalia and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia. The Somalia guidance note specifically reviewed key topics, including mandates, partnerships, security and strategic frameworks, as well as the authority, roles, responsibilities and reporting requirements of the Special Representative. All Department desks backstopping special political missions were requested to tailor the template guidance to their specific context.

9. In addition, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs provided support to the development in 2018 of draft compacts for all heads of missions led by the Department. The current version of the template commits the mission head to delivering results and fulfilling responsibilities. It includes several blank tables in which the leader can propose mission-specific objectives, accomplishments and performance measures. However, since 2019, with the roll-out of delegation of authority, the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance has administered and coordinated all senior leaders' compacts. As a result, compacts for heads of missions started being directly routed to that Department.

10. Since 2019, all field-level compacts have been available on iSeek. These include 11 missions supported by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, although none led by special envoys or advisers, a gap also noted by OIOS in its 2017 evaluation (see [E/AC.51/2017/6](#), para. 53). The 2020 template was undergoing a review process at the time of this assessment, with the final authorization yet to receive the approval of the Secretary-General.

11. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs staff interviewed also noted the significance of both the mission leadership guidance and compacts in the broader context of the Organization's management reform, which has prioritized enhancing transparency and accountability and strengthening a culture of performance management.

12. Based on the above actions, this recommendation is considered implemented. Going forward, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs should tailor the new mission leadership guidance to all missions supported by the Department.

Recommendation 2

Fill key analytical gaps in political analysis and evaluation

13. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

The Department of Political Affairs should fill two key analytical gaps, both linked to its learning and accountability needs as rooted in the 2016–2019 strategic plan and the Department's priorities, namely:

- Its political analysis, as a tool for early warning leading to early action and as an input into Headquarters and field-level planning processes; and

- Its evaluation function and other sources of evaluative knowledge (e.g., lesson-learning, after-action reviews), by ensuring that the planned revision of the Department's evaluation policy adequately addresses independence and resource and risk-based planning gaps.

Indicators of achievement: The actions above are undertaken, and their implementation monitored, resulting in analytical products that are tailored to the knowledge needs of the Department, are of high quality and credible to key stakeholders and are used to inform decision-making.

14. To bolster its political analysis, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs undertook broad-based efforts across a range of areas related to early warning and planning, linking its activities to the Secretary-General's strategic priorities and reform initiatives where relevant. These included courses on political-economic analysis, which presented case studies such as why such analysis matters for the Department and how to select levels of analysis and interpretation, as well as more general training on drafting for political analysis. The Department also conducted a course on e-analytics for political analysis, which covered topics such as visualizing data, digital forensic investigations and using technology in emergencies and helped to inform a practice note and public e-analytics guide, published in January 2019.² The course and guide were carried out in partnership with Global Pulse and a range of other partners. In partnership with one of the members of the High-level Advisory Board on Mediation, the Department also developed a toolkit to assess risks and opportunities in the use of new technologies in the field of armed conflict and mediation.³

15. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs also built staff capacity to use tools and methodologies for conflict analysis and United Nations strategic assessments. As an example, the Department provided the 2019 terms of reference for a strategic review of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa (UNOCA). The assessment covered the adequacy of the scope of the UNOCA mandate and its activities in the context of the Secretary-General's priorities on conflict prevention and related principles.

16. To bolster its evaluation function, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs recruited a dedicated Programme Management Officer at the P-4 level to revamp the Department's evaluation policy and deliver an annual evaluation plan. The new policy was finalized in December 2017, replacing the Department's 2012 policy. It reviews the relationship between evaluation and programme planning, defines criteria for selection of evaluations and clarifies the roles and responsibilities of various entities within the Department, including the Learning and Evaluation Board, the Office of the Under-Secretary-General and the Heads of Special Political Missions and Political Directors. It also includes measures for management response and monitoring of the Department's own evaluation recommendations. While the policy specifies that senior management is responsible for ensuring sufficient funding is available for evaluations, the Department staff interviewed questioned the adequacy of resources for the Department's evaluation and broader knowledge management framework.

17. In the context of the peace and security and management reforms, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs has undertaken additional measures to bolster its evaluation capacity in line with the recommendation. Following endorsement by the Under-Secretary-General for Political and

² Available from <https://beta.unglobalpulse.org/document/e-analytics-guide-using-data-and-new-technology-for-peacemaking-preventive-diplomacy-and-peacebuilding/>.

³ Available at <https://peacemaker.un.org/digitaltoolkit>.

Peacebuilding Affairs and Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations of a mechanism to harmonize knowledge management workstreams across the peace and security pillar, the two Departments jointly established a Peace and Security Pillar Guidance Development and Learning Steering Committee, which will replace the Learning and Evaluation Board of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.⁴ This Steering Committee met for the first time in April 2019.

18. Based on the above actions, this recommendation is considered to be implemented. Going forward, the Department should ensure that its evaluation and broader knowledge management functions are adequately resourced.

Recommendation 3

Strengthen Headquarters and field-level planning processes

19. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

The Department should strengthen Headquarters and field-level planning processes by ensuring that:

- All Headquarters divisions incorporate knowledge generated from data-driven analysis (see recommendation 2) and articulate a well-evidenced rationale for where they will invest their finite resources and through which specific types of support, both individually and in collaboration with other divisions; and
- All mission plans and associated documents (budgets and organization charts) are quality-assured for consistently high clarity on how the expectations of the Security Council and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General will be achieved (e.g., structural alignment with mandate, outcome-focused indicators of achievement and exit strategy), in line with recommendation 1.

Indicators of achievement: The Department of Political Affairs undertakes quality assurance of all mission plans, and necessary changes are made to achieve full alignment with Security Council and Executive Office expectations.

20. In addition to the steps undertaken in response to recommendation 2 to bolster its political analysis, evaluation function and strategic links to the Department of Peace Operations in the context of the peace and security reform, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs developed a process for implementing recommendations from learning and evaluation exercises, as outlined in a process note dated April 2017 by the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. That note included a description of the responsibilities within the Department for extracting actionable recommendations for approval by the Under-Secretary-General. Furthermore, learning and evaluation reports are accompanied by an implementation tracker table with details like key actions, suggested actions, responsibilities and timeframes, which are in turn assessed on a biannual basis.

21. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs has also completed an independent evaluation cycle of its strategic plan for the period 2016–2019 to inform the Department’s new 2020–2022 strategic plan. The evaluation noted the Department’s progress in incorporating knowledge generated from learning and evaluation exercises into departmental planning, but also recommended that more be

⁴ Under its terms of reference, the Steering Committee will identify the learning priorities of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Department of Peace Operations; agree on joint priority areas for guidance development/revision; monitor progress and review guidance development and learning activities undertaken by both Departments; and exchange information on ongoing learning projects with cross-cutting impact, with inclusion of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs and Department of Peace Operations regional divisions and peace missions in selection and prioritization.

done to ensure that knowledge and best practices regularly inform and guide the planning and implementation of departmental activities.⁵

22. With regard to mission planning, the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs undertook several steps to assure quality, including actions taken in response to recommendation 1 on institutionalizing the Department's role in contributing to field-level accountability. To strengthen its central oversight, the Office of the Under-Secretary-General has increased its coordination with the Guidance and Learning Unit at Headquarters and with the strategic planning processes of peacekeeping missions. As an example of the latter for ongoing missions, the Department sends, via code cable, a request for special political missions to identify their strategic priorities at the start of regular budget planning, initiating a planning conversation with Headquarters and guiding subsequent budget development. For new missions, the Department undertook several initiatives, including a study on lessons learned from special political mission start-ups, which made recommendations similar to those of OIOS to strengthen the mission planning process. In response to both assessments, the Department has strengthened its role in the inter-agency planning process for new missions through its support to the Secretary-General's planning directive (the tool used to guide and coordinate inter-agency planning processes), and has supported the planning directives for various missions, including in Colombia and Haiti. These directives outline the documents needed for mission planning (including the mission concept, assessments of the operating environment and the communications strategy), describe the planning process and responsibilities therein and review the mission's reporting requirements. In the case of both Columbia and Haiti, the planning teams were deployed to the field under the leadership of a D-level staff from the Department who coordinated the efforts and managed the planning team, also composed of surge capacity deployed from within the Department.

23. Based on the above actions, this recommendation is considered to be implemented. However, there remains a need for continued progress to strengthen both Headquarters and field-level planning processes in the context of the peace and security and management reforms. The reforms' emphasis on cross-departmental coordination and information-sharing presents opportunities for the Department to strengthen its role in the inter-agency planning process for new missions, particularly vis-à-vis the Department of Peace Operations and the shared regional divisions, which could be further leveraged. In addition, the shift of authority from Headquarters to missions has helped to align accountability with operational responsibility, but it has also challenged the Department's ability to maintain managerial and strategic oversight in some areas, such as the budgeting and prioritization process outlined above.

III. Conclusion

24. The Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs provided sufficient evidence to demonstrate that it has implemented all three endorsed recommendations from the OIOS evaluation report. The steps it has taken to do so reflect a Department-wide emphasis on contributing to field-level accountability, bolstering political analysis and evaluation and strengthening Headquarters and field-level planning processes.

25. Interviews with Department staff and documents indicated some early positive results of the actions outlined in the present report. In terms of political analysis, the

⁵ See finding 10 and recommendation 4 of the Department of Political Affairs strategic plan for the period 2016–2019: end-of-cycle evaluation report, available from https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/dpa_strategic_plan_2016-2019.pdf.

Security Council welcomed the report of the Department on its strategic review of UNOCA, noting the report's recommendations for the Office's enhancement in early warning and analysis, among other areas (S/PRST/2019/10). In a recent evaluation of the Department's conflict prevention work, an OIOS independent expert concluded that the Department's analytical outputs were generally of high quality, demonstrating a clear understanding of country and regional level contexts. In terms of planning, the Department staff interviewed also pointed to positive results from the strengthened mission planning process in enhancing inter-agency coordination and better meeting the expectations of the Security Council and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. Finally, the new strategic plan for the period 2020–2022 speaks to the Department's role in a unified peace and security pillar with a renewed commitment to prevention and sustaining peace.

(Signed) Fatoumata **Ndiaye**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services
March 2020

Annex***Comments received from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs**

Thank you for your memorandum and for sharing with us the formal draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the triennial review of the implementation of recommendations from the evaluation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs ([E/AC.51/2017/6](#)).

I am pleased to see that the OIOS review has taken note of our efforts and considers all recommendations as implemented. We welcome that the report highlights our key actions to implement the evaluation recommendations.

As mentioned in your report, my staff provided comments on an earlier informal draft report. We concur with the main findings of the review and have no further comments on this formal draft report.

I take this opportunity to thank the OIOS Inspection and Evaluation Division, in particular the review team that worked closely with us on this exercise.

* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services presents the full text of comments received from the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs on the triennial review of the implementation of recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its fifty-seventh session on the programme evaluation of the Department of Political Affairs. This practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution [64/263](#), following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.