



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2018/004

Audit of strategic communications and public information activities in the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support

The framework for conducting strategic communications and public information activities was adequate; however, there was a need to disseminate the strategy document, strengthen work planning and monitoring and clarify responsibilities

2 February 2018
Assignment No. AP2017/600/01

Audit of strategic communications and public information activities in the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of strategic communications and public information activities in the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support (DPKO/DFS). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the management of DPKO/DFS strategic communications and public information activities. The audit covered the period from 1 July 2015 to 31 March 2017 and included strategic communication planning, including crisis communications, management of the Public Affairs Section (PAS), coordination mechanisms and support to field missions

DPKO/DFS established an adequate framework for the management of strategic communications and public information activities, and PAS adequately supported the activities. However, there was a need to disseminate strategy documents, strengthen work planning and monitoring and clarify responsibilities.

OIOS made three recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, DPKO/DFS needed to:

- Formally disseminate the Peacekeeping Communications Strategy for 2017/18 to relevant departmental functions to ensure implementation of key activities and attainment of communications and public information objectives;
- Enhance work planning and monitoring arrangements of PAS by ensuring tasks are assigned to specific individuals and are time bound; and
- In collaboration with Department of Public Information, begin a formal process to clarify the respective responsibilities relating to strategic communications and public information activities for peace operations.

DPKO/DFS accepted the recommendations and have yet to initiate action to implement them.

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Audit of strategic communications and public information activities in the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of strategic communications and public information activities in the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support (DPKO/DFS).
2. DPKO/DFS strategic communications and public information activities for peacekeeping operations are primarily undertaken by the Public Affairs Section (PAS) in the Office of the Chief of Staff, one of the shared resources providing services to both departments. Overall responsibility for the Organization's communications and public information programme resides with the Department of Public Information (DPI).
3. The core functions of PAS are as follows:
 - a. Managing media relations, publicity and external relations, including the development and implementation of communications plans and campaigns and representational activities;
 - b. Managing corporate messaging and internal communications;
 - c. Providing technical advice and operational support to public information components in field missions including on planning, policy, training and evaluation issues; and
 - d. Maintaining the United Nations Peacekeeping website in conjunction with DPI.
4. PAS has five authorized posts (three professional and two general service) including a Chief at the P-5 level. PAS expenditures for the period July 2015 to June 2017 was \$2.17 million, comprising staff costs of \$1.72 million, travel of \$60,000 and operational costs of \$390,000.
5. Comments provided by DPKO/DFS are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

6. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over the management of DPKO/DFS strategic communications and public information activities.
7. This audit was included in the 2017 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the operational criticality of DPKO/DFS public information activities, including recent communications crises concerning peace operations, sexual exploitation and abuse in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), and cholera in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti.
8. OIOS conducted this audit from May to August 2017. The audit covered the period from 1 July 2015 to 31 March 2017. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risk areas which included: strategic communication planning, including crisis communications; management of PAS; coordination mechanisms; and support to field missions.

9. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews of key personnel, (b) reviews of relevant documentation, (c) analytical review of data, policies and procedures; and (d) sample testing of selected public information outputs.

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

III. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Strategic communication planning

The communication strategy needed to be issued timely

11. The Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations, in its report issued in March 2016 (A/70/19), noted the increasing complexity of United Nations peacekeeping operations and urged the Secretariat to better develop strategic communication and operational-level public information activities to ensure continued support for United Nations peacekeeping and to respond more effectively to public perceptions of the role and impact of peacekeeping on the ground.

12. PAS developed the Peacekeeping Communications Strategy for 2017/18, which adequately covered important aspects such as: its objectives, key audiences and partners, approach to implementing programmes, communication tools and channels, key principles, key messages, the need for monitoring and evaluating activities, and resource requirements. Although the strategy had been approved by the Under-Secretary-General, DPKO, it had not been cleared by the Senior Management Team or formally disseminated within DPKO/DFS. This increased the risk of non-implementation of activities envisaged in the strategy.

13. PAS explained that those responsible for communications within DPKO/DFS had been made aware of the strategic communications objectives at the DPKO retreat in mid-June 2017, as well as through the circulation of communications documents and focal points meeting, among others. However, formal dissemination of the strategy is required to clearly communicate other important aspects of the strategy as well so as to better ensure the attainment of its key objectives.

(1) DPKO/DFS should formally disseminate the Peacekeeping Communications Strategy for 2017/18 to relevant departmental functions to ensure implementation of key activities and attainment of communications and public information objectives.

DPKO/DFS accepted recommendation 1 and stated that PAS would promulgate the approved comprehensive communication strategy and implementation plan including a timetable outlining the process and milestones. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of evidence of implementation of these actions.

Guidelines existed to guide PAS' day to day operations in crisis situations

14. The United Nations Crisis Management Policy, dated July 2016, indicates roles and responsibilities at United Nations Headquarters and at the field level for decision making in situations that require a United Nations system-wide response. PAS roles and responsibilities in developing or ongoing crisis situations in countries/areas with deployed peacekeeping operations are outlined in the recently promulgated DPKO/DFS standard operating procedures - Headquarters crisis response in support of peacekeeping operations, dated January 2017. PAS is also guided by the United Nations Communications Group,

standard operating procedures – How to communicate in a crisis (2017). OIOS concluded that these documents were adequate in explaining the overall nature of the role of PAS from a policy and/or a strategic perspective, and guiding its day to day operations in crisis situations.

B. Management of the Public Affairs Section

Work planning and monitoring processes needed to be enhanced

15. The Secretary-General's bulletin on regulations and rules governing programme planning, the programme aspects of the budget, the monitoring of implementation and the methods of evaluation (ST/SGB/2016/6) requires that objectives for Secretariat action be, to the extent possible, concrete and time-limited; achievement of the objectives and expected accomplishments should be verifiable either directly or through evaluation.

16. PAS workplans for 2015/16 and 2016/17 were documented and activities were aligned to its mandate. The Section's workplans were communicated to and understood by staff. The 2016/17 Section workplan detailed five objectives and related activities in the areas of: a) supporting executive direction and management of DPKO and DFS including informing/advising leadership on the global reportage of issues of concern to peacekeeping operations; b) effective crisis preparedness and management which include preparation of press guidance, communication plan and messages within 24 hours of a crisis; c) enhancing internal management and information flow including coordination of updates to iSeek and DPKO/DFS intranet; d) reform, change management and process improvement plans including development or revision of key policy documents; and e) effective guidance and support to field missions including technical assessments of field missions. However, the workplans did not always include timelines for completion of tasks or assign the staff responsible for executing them.

17. The audit reviewed information supporting the implementation of four outputs/tasks from the 2015/16 workplan, and six outputs/tasks from the 2016/17 workplan. OIOS noted that as of August 2017, 7 of the 10 tasks were assessed as not applicable, partially addressed or not completed due to inadequate capacity, delays in related activities and other competing priorities. Also, there was no evidence of regular monitoring and subsequent adjustment of the workplan.

18. Therefore, OIOS determined that while the Section had planned activities and tasks in line with its mandates, it had not been effectively utilising the workplan to consistently monitor completion of specific tasks against established timelines and making appropriate adjustments.

(2) DPKO/DFS should take steps to enhance the work planning and monitoring arrangements of the Public Affairs Section by ensuring tasks are assigned to specific individuals and are time bound.

DPKO/DFS accepted recommendation 2 and stated that PAS would create and maintain an up to date workflow matrix, including specific taskings and timetables on all strategic activities. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of the workflow matrix.

Promulgation of digital communications guidelines was being considered

19. The June 2015 Report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations stated that embracing communications methods that are now standard practice elsewhere is critical if United Nations peace operations want to be relevant in a fast-moving world. More effective use of digital media should generate feedback on a mission and its communications effort, and help to fine-tune messaging.

20. In this regard, OIOS noted that the PAS workplan for 2016/17 included development of digital communications guidelines for United Nations peacekeeping operations by May 2017. The purpose of the guidelines is to provide public information staff with guidance on the importance of social media and how to optimally manage digital media platforms. However, the guidelines were yet to be developed. PAS explained that the June 2017 meeting of heads of public information had discussed digital guidelines that will be included as an annex to the 2016 policy on Strategic Communications and Public Information, once developed. This was dependent on the issuance of an overall policy on digital communications by DPI which had not yet been promulgated. Therefore, OIOS did not make a recommendation on this issue at this time.

A tool was being procured to analyze outcomes of public campaigns

21. The Secretary-General's bulletin on regulations and rules governing programme planning, the programme aspects of the budget, the monitoring of implementation and the methods of evaluation (ST/SGB/2016/6) requires that achievement of objectives should be verifiable either directly or through evaluation.

22. PAS is tasked with the implementation of public campaigns, including the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, International Women's Day, Chiefs of Defence Conference, the United Nations Day and the United Nations Chiefs of Police Summit. The Section conducted evaluations of the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers, noting the press coverage, media interviews and exposure on social media platforms. The evaluation of the 2017 event analysed 'what worked', and 'what didn't work'. However, similar analyses were not conducted for other campaigns.

23. PAS stated that the International Day of United Nations Peacekeepers is its flagship campaign to which the majority of its resources are directed. PAS was in the process of acquiring, with the assistance of DPI, a social media analytic tool, which would be used to conduct monthly analyses of social media data, including geographical distribution and language. Therefore, OIOS did not make a recommendation on this issue.

C. Coordination mechanisms

Further clarity was needed on segregation of tasks and ownership on strategic communications and public information activities between DPKO/DFS and DPI

24. The report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations and the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (A/55/977, issued in June 2001), clarified the responsibilities of DPI and DPKO in the delivery of public information programmes. Annex M of the report contained a comprehensive list of various public information tasks assigned to each department, i.e. DPKO or DPI, or both, and the office responsible for inputs and/or advice. For this approach to be effective, the report highlighted the need for close collaboration between the two departments.

25. Subsequently, the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening the capacity of the United Nations to manage and sustain peace operations (A/61/858/Add.1 issued on 17 April 2007) stated that the operational context had changed dramatically so that the distribution of labour between DPKO and DPI as articulated in Annex M of A/55/977 no longer reflected their current public information requirements. However, no alternate distribution of labour was articulated until March 2017, when PAS and the Peace and Security Section (PSS) of DPI prepared a draft document titled, "PAS/PSS Division of Labour". OIOS

review of the draft document noted that it was not sufficiently comprehensive, as it did not include all activities undertaken by PAS and PSS such as:

- Organizing and overseeing pre-deployment field surveys of public information, media and public outreach requirements;
- Advising on public information related requirements to be included in status of mission/forces agreements; and
- Translating the overall political and strategic information requirements of each mission into operational public information plans.

26. PAS stated that while it was important to identify overlaps and gaps in responsibilities and areas where different sections complemented each other, the respective roles and responsibilities were operationally understood by those involved in public information activities. While OIOS interviews with relevant personnel confirmed that individuals involved in strategic communications and public information activities were aware of their current responsibilities, it is a well-established and good practice to have properly articulated and documented distribution of responsibilities, particularly when more than one department and/or location is involved. This would help mitigate the risks of blurred division of labour between DPKO/DFS and DPI, unfocussed initiatives and unnecessary confusion.

(3) DPKO/DFS should, in collaboration with DPI, begin a formal process to clarify their respective responsibilities relating to strategic communications and public information activities for peace operations leading to an update of Annex M of A/55/977.

DPKO/DFS accepted recommendation 3. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence of commencement of the formal process leading to the update of the Annex.

Strategic communications and public information activities were adequately coordinated

27. According to the Secretary-General's bulletin on the organization of DPKO (ST/SGB/2010/1), PAS is responsible for supporting the public information components of department-led operations, in cooperation with DPI.

28. Accordingly, PAS attended monthly meetings of the United Nations Communications Group to discuss upcoming campaigns, system-wide communications issues, and other related work. PAS also attended interdepartmental meetings as observers, including the biweekly morning meetings attended by DPKO/DFS Under-Secretaries-General and directors and the weekly Executive Senior Management Team meetings to remain apprised of current issues including policy and guidance issues. At the daily morning news briefings, PAS was responsible for providing the United Nations Spokesperson with information on relevant peacekeeping issues, as well as attending the daily communications meeting led by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General.

29. PAS also co-chairs two interdepartmental working groups: The Web Editorial Board¹ (WEB) and the Public Information Working Group (PIWG). WEB meets to agree on the strategic and editorial direction of the United Nations Peacekeeping web platform and PIWG is a bimonthly forum of communications

¹ WEB comprised representatives from PAS and PSS, the Web platform project manager of DFS, Public Information team of the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), Communications Officers of United Nations Police and United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS), Peace and Security focal point, and Web Services Section, DPI (when appropriate).

professionals² that meets to discuss ongoing projects, upcoming initiatives and challenges and other issues of mutual interests. While WEB had clear terms of reference, those for PIWG had not been formalized due to competing priorities. PAS stated it would work with DPI to formalize them.

30. The segregation of duties and coordination of various tasks for the implementation of the 2017 Peacekeepers Day campaign were detailed in a matrix, which assisted in effectively distributing responsibilities between PAS, the Office of Military Affairs and the Police Division, DPKO and DPI.

31. Consequently, OIOS determined that adequate coordination mechanisms existed between PAS, other sections of DPKO/DFS, DPI, Office of Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, and Executive Office of Secretary-General in ensuring the delivery of DPKO/DFS strategic communications and public information activities.

D. Support to field missions

PAS was planning to document support available to public information components in the field

32. According to the mandate of PAS, the core activities of the Section include providing technical advice and operational support to public information components in field missions on planning, policy, training and evaluation issues.

33. PAS was supporting field missions, including conducting backstopping activities such as providing guidance on media issues and technical assessments of the strategic communications function. During the period under review, PAS conducted such an assessment of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and MINUSCA. PAS also: (a) assisted substantive offices of DPKO/DFS to disseminate their internal communications; (b) provided advice on developing messages on the Ebola crisis jointly with DPA; (c) organized briefings for senior officials from field missions visiting Headquarters; and (d) prepared daily media lines on mission specific communications issues. Additionally, PAS provided support to the Field Personnel Division, DFS in the recruitment and rostering of candidates for field mission communications staff.

34. However, there was no document that elaborated details of the support provided by Headquarters to relevant sections and functions in the field i.e. the Strategic Communication and Public Information (SCPI) components. The audit noted that while the DPI/DPKO/DFS policy on strategic communications and public information, updated in November 2016, provided guidance on the establishment and functions of SCPI components in field missions, it was silent on the specific nature of the support to be provided by PAS or PSS/DPI, and there were no other formal documents that outlined such details.

35. PAS stated that its overall role at Headquarters was understood by SCPI components in the field. Furthermore, PAS, PSS and the DPA communications team co-host the biennial heads of public information meeting, which is attended by mission SCPI components as well. To ensure that SCPI components in the field fully avail of PAS' support, PAS planned, in close consultation with related substantive sections, to formally document capacities available at Headquarters in PAS and other relevant communications units to support field missions in strategic communications activities. Based on this information, no recommendation was made.

² From PAS and PSS, United Nations Police, UNMAS, News and Media Division, DPI and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Peacekeeping websites were migrated to a new platform

36. According to the mandate of PAS, the core activities of the Section include maintaining the United Nations Headquarters Peacekeeping website in conjunction with DPI.

37. During the audit period, PAS focused on migrating the United Nations Headquarters Peacekeeping website to the new Drupal platform. Additionally, PAS was responsible for the review and clearing of the content of the peacekeeping missions' websites.

38. The audit confirmed that PAS provided comments and guidance on the contents of missions' website in conjunction with other relevant parties in the context of WEB. In facilitating this project, WEB maintained a list of action items required, and the go live dates for the mission websites. The new Peacekeeping website went live on 19 October 2017. There were no reportable issues identified.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

39. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the management and staff of DPKO/DFS for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

(Signed) Eleanor T. Burns
Director, Internal Audit Division
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of strategic communications and public information activities in the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ³ / Important ⁴	C/ O ⁵	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁶
1	DPKO/DFS should formally disseminate the Peacekeeping Communications Strategy for 2017/18 to relevant departmental functions to ensure implementation of key activities and attainment of communications and public information objectives.	Important	O	Submission of the final promulgated comprehensive communication strategy and implementation plan including a timetable outlining the process and milestones.	30 June 2018
2	DPKO/DFS should take steps to enhance the work planning and monitoring arrangements of the Public Affairs Section by ensuring tasks are assigned to specific individuals and are time bound.	Important	O	Submission of an up to date workflow matrix, including specific tasks and timetables on all strategic activities.	30 June 2018
3	DPKO/DFS should, in collaboration with DPI, begin a formal process to clarify their respective responsibilities relating to strategic communications and public information activities for peace operations leading to an update of Annex M of A/55/977.	Important	O	Submission of evidence of commencement of the formal process leading to the update of Annex M of A/55/977.	31 December 2019

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 DPKO/DFS in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response



CONFIDENTIAL

Immediate

TO: Muriette Lawrence-Hume, Chief, New York Audit Service,
A: Internal Audit Division
OIOS

DATE:

JAN 17 2018

REFERENCE: 2018.UNHQ.AR-BOI.MEMO.35592.2

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

FROM: Lisa Buttenheim, Assistant Secretary-General
DE: for Field Support

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'LH' or similar initials.

SUBJECT: **Draft report on an audit of strategic communications and public information activities**
OBJET: **in the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support. (Assignment No. AP2017/600/01)**

1. I refer to your memorandum, dated 10 January 2018, regarding the above-mentioned audit. We note that OIOS has taken into account our comments provided earlier. Please note that DPKO and DFS do not have any further comments on the findings in the report. We have, however, updated Appendix I to reflect our comments and the individual responsible for the implementation of the recommendations with the deadline.

2. Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the draft report. We stand ready to provide any further information that may be required.

cc: Ms. Cynthia Avena-Castilo

Management Response

Audit of strategic communications and public information activities in the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	DPKO/DFS should formally disseminate the Peacekeeping Communications Strategy for 2017/18 to relevant departmental functions to ensure implementation of key activities and attainment of communications and public information objectives.	Important	Yes	Chief, Public Affairs Section	Second Quarter of 2018	DPKO and DFS' comments are reflected in the report.
2	DPKO/DFS should take steps to enhance the work planning and monitoring arrangements of the Public Affairs Section by ensuring tasks are assigned to specific individuals and are time bound.	Important	Yes	Chief, Public Affairs Section	Second Quarter of 2018	DPKO and DFS' comments are reflected in the report.
3	DPKO/DFS should, in collaboration with DPI, begin a formal process to clarify their respective responsibilities relating to strategic communications and public information activities for peace operations leading to an update of Annex M of A/55/977.	Important	Yes	Chief, Public Affairs Section	Fourth Quarter of 2019	DPKO and DFS' comments are reflected in the report.

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.