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Item 3 (b) of the provisional agenda\*\*

Programme questions: evaluation

## Triennial review of the implementation of recommendations on the programme evaluation of the Office of Legal Affairs

### Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

#### *Summary*

The present report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), prepared by the Inspection and Evaluation Division, is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session (see [A/37/38 \(Supp\)](#), para. 362) to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on the evaluations submitted to the Committee. The present triennial review determined the extent to which the recommendations emanating from the OIOS programme evaluation of the Office of Legal Affairs ([E/AC.51/2019/9](#)) were implemented.

The recommendations addressed various aspects of Office of Legal Affairs relevance and effectiveness in implementing its mandate. At the conclusion of its fifty-ninth session, the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse 6 recommendations of the OIOS evaluation report (recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7) and that the General Assembly consider recommendation 5. The triennial review has determined that all six recommendations endorsed by the Committee were implemented. The full impact of the implementation of the recommendations thus far could not be assessed, as the Office had not yet fully operationalized some of the recommended policies and frameworks. Some evidence of concrete positive outcomes was noted.

\* The dates for the substantive session are tentative.

\*\* [E/AC.51/2022/1](#).



Recommendation 1 addressed the need for the Office of Legal Affairs to develop and implement a technical cooperation strategy covering relevant areas of international law and most importantly, international trade activities. In response to this recommendation, a technical cooperation strategy was developed and operationalized by the International Trade Law Division. The strategy reviewed the thematic and regional priorities of beneficiaries based on their need and the mandate of the Office, reviewed the Division's comparative advantages and value added, assessed current partnerships and those that were critical to implementing the Division's mandate, and assessed and determined dissemination strategies. As part of the strategy, the Division also identified the need to implement a new records system for technical assistance to improve the accessibility of records and create a centralized knowledge repository with meaningful data. The strategy has been mainstreamed into the Division's planning, organization, delivery and evaluation of technical cooperation activities. This recommendation was considered implemented.

Recommendation 2 addressed the need for the Office of Legal Affairs to review all processes and available standard operating procedures across organizational units and functional areas to identify processes that might require new or updated standard operating procedures. In response to this recommendation, the Office reviewed existing processes and created and issued two new standard operating procedures in the reporting period. The Office has also identified two other standard operating procedures for review and updating. The ongoing process for the identification, update, elaboration and issuance of these standard operating procedures has allowed the Office to streamline certain aspects of their internal processes, evaluate their effectiveness and establish a clear and concise chain of responsibility. This recommendation was considered implemented.

Recommendation 3 addressed the need for the Office of Legal Affairs to establish formal mechanisms for information-sharing across functional areas to discuss best practices and lessons learned, including on the best modalities of delivery, and monitoring and evaluation practices. In response to this recommendation, the Office has established the Evaluation Working Group, which serves as the principal forum for the exchange of best practices, lessons learned and standards on monitoring and evaluation, as well as for the discussion, development and sharing of methodologies, toolkits, templates and tools to support divisions in their assessment efforts. In addition, monitoring and evaluation updates and discussions have become embedded in the context of the Leadership Dialogue held every year, chaired by the United Nations Legal Counsel and attended by all Office of Legal Affairs heads of unit and directors, and annual town halls. These mechanisms have increased the Office's capacity for information-sharing on evaluation and have led to a deeper understanding of the value of monitoring and evaluation in furtherance of the Office's mandate. This recommendation was considered implemented.

Recommendation 4 addressed the need for the Office of Legal Affairs to strengthen its monitoring and evaluation practices through the establishment of a dedicated mechanism at the senior level that periodically reviews performance. In response to this recommendation, the Office established an Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit and issued a revised evaluation policy in 2020 that formalized the roles of the Unit, the Evaluation Working Group, senior management and the evaluation functions within the Office of the Under-Secretary-General. This policy was shared by the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel with all Office heads of unit. This recommendation was considered implemented.

Recommendation 6 addressed the need for the Office of Legal Affairs to more systematically review and assess whether it is fit for purpose in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals and the different changes and mandates that will ensue as a result of the United Nations reforms. In response to this recommendation, the Office established a working group on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The working group has been focused on specific inputs and processes related to the Goals for which the Office has a specific mandate. The working group has been instrumental in ensuring the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals in the workplan of the Office. This recommendation was considered implemented.

Recommendation 7 addressed the need for the Office of Legal Affairs to quickly fill vacancies by selecting qualified candidates from rosters, including by updating available rosters. In response to this recommendation, the Office updated all existing rosters and made progress in filling the vacancies, following the significant impact of the temporary freeze on recruitment. The Office's vacancy rate decreased from 9 per cent to 7.5 per cent during the period under review. This recommendation was considered implemented.

## I. Introduction

1. At its fifty-ninth session, in 2019, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), Inspection and Evaluation Division, on the programme evaluation of the Office of Legal Affairs (E/AC.51/2019/9).

2. The Committee expressed appreciation for the report and the positive overall assessment of the work of the Office of Legal Affairs. In paragraph 524 of its report (A/74/16), the Committee recommended that the General Assembly endorse the recommendations contained in paragraphs 75 to 78, 80 and 81 of the report, and that the Assembly consider the recommendations contained in paragraph 79.

3. The present report is issued pursuant to a triennial review of the recommendations and examines the status of implementation of the six recommendations contained in the evaluation that were endorsed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination. The review also addressed, where possible, the extent to which implementation of the recommendations contributed to programme changes.

4. The methodology for the triennial review included:

(a) Review and analysis of the biennial progress reports on the status of recommendations, which are monitored through the OIOS recommendations database;

(b) Analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from the Office of Legal Affairs on various topics related to the recommendations;

(c) Remote interviews conducted with a purposive sample of Office of Legal Affairs staff.

5. The report incorporates comments received from the Office of Legal Affairs during the drafting process. A final draft was shared with the Office for its formal comments, which are contained in the annex to the present report. OIOS expresses its appreciation to the Office for the cooperation it extended in the preparation of the present report.

## II. Results

6. In its evaluation, OIOS noted that the Office of Legal Affairs had effectively delivered its work programme and achieved significant outcomes in all functional areas. However, it noted that some gaps remained in the strategic approach of technical cooperation delivery, standard operating procedures, identification and dissemination of lessons learned, full integration of the Sustainable Development Goals and monitoring and evaluation of its work. In that regard, OIOS made the following seven recommendations to the Office, six of which were endorsed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination: to develop and implement a technical cooperation strategy covering relevant areas of international law, but most importantly international trade activities; to review all processes and available standard operating procedures across organizational units and functional areas to identify those processes that might require new or updated standard operating procedures; to establish formal mechanisms for information-sharing across functional areas to discuss best practices and lessons learned across the Office, including on the best modalities of delivery and monitoring and evaluation practices; to strengthen its monitoring and self-evaluation practices through the establishment of a dedicated function that implements the Office's evaluation policy and workplans; to more

systemically review and assess whether it is fit for purpose in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations reforms; and to quickly fill vacancies by selecting candidates from rosters.

7. In its review, OIOS determined that all six recommendations endorsed by the Committee for Programme and Coordination were implemented (recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7). There is some evidence of concrete positive outcomes resulting from the implemented recommendations. The implementation status of each recommendation is described below.

**Recommendation 1**  
**Technical cooperation strategy**

8. Recommendation 1 reads as follows:

The Office of Legal Affairs should develop and implement a technical cooperation strategy covering relevant areas of international law, but most importantly, international trade activities. The strategy should at a minimum:

- (a) Review the thematic and regional priorities of the beneficiaries based on their needs and the mandates of the Office;
- (b) Review comparative advantages and value added to the different areas of work;
- (c) Assess the Office's current partnership arrangements and determine which ones are deemed necessary and critical to implement its mandate thematically, regionally and functionally;
- (d) Assess and determine dissemination strategies and fundraising needs to supplement and strengthen the delivery of its technical assistance.

*Indicator of achievement:* technology cooperation strategy developed and implemented

9. In response to the OIOS recommendation, the International Trade Law Division developed a technical cooperation strategy in 2019. The strategy focused on "non-legislative activities". Non-legislative activities were described as such to distinguish them from the support the Division provides in the actual preparation of United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) texts. Specifically, this suite of activities comprised interventions to encourage the promotion and adoption of UNCITRAL conventions, including advisory services to assist in enacting UNCITRAL texts and capacity-building to assist in understanding, using and interpreting UNCITRAL texts.

10. The technical cooperation strategy was the outcome of a review that clarified the key processes, objectives and key elements necessary to deliver International Trade Law Division technical cooperation. The review noted that the Division's comparative advantage had been affirmed by beneficiaries in that the Division provided neutrality, technical skill sets, institutional memory, credibility and a leadership role in harmonization and modernization of international trade law practice.

11. The technical cooperation strategy objectives were the following: to ensure that the Division's non-legislative activities have a sustainable impact; to respond to States' and partners' needs; to align with the Sustainable Development Goals; and to support Member States towards reaching the Goals. The stated key rationale of the strategy was to ensure that appropriate resources were available to meet these objectives.

12. Drawing on the 2019 review, one key element of the technical cooperation strategy involved categorizing non-legislative activities and their potential impact in terms of implementation of UNCITRAL texts. Another key element involved the

creation of a tool to assist in the planning and prioritization of non-legislative activities in a manner that took into account: UNCITRAL mandates/instructions; needs communicated from States and partners; subject-specific objectives (that may be based on texts recently adopted by UNCITRAL or recent events); objectives set out in the documents that concern established cooperation with partners and donors; Sustainable Development Goals, gender and human rights objectives; and the need to determine dissemination strategies and fundraising needs.

13. Drawing on this tool, an annual workplan was created to reflect International Trade Law Division priorities, considering the objectives of partners and donors and reflecting relevant Sustainable Development Goals. The strategy further noted that Division management had to agree on the objectives and indicators for individual subject areas and existing or desirable partnerships, with input from relevant technical leads in each subject area. Similarly, Division management was set to annually identify fundraising activities for the year. Fundraising was typically undertaken through memorandums of understanding. According to interviews with Office of Legal Affairs staff, the Division also sought to enhance its fundraising abilities through the training of staff members in the requirements of development agencies.

14. The review of the creation of the technical cooperation strategy further identified that effective implementation of the strategy required an improved system for tracking technical cooperation and assistance to ensure consistent and useable data generation that could be used later to inform decision-making but also for evaluating the strategy and delivery of technical cooperation. Therefore, the International Trade Law Division designed a new system for keeping track of non-legislative activities records.

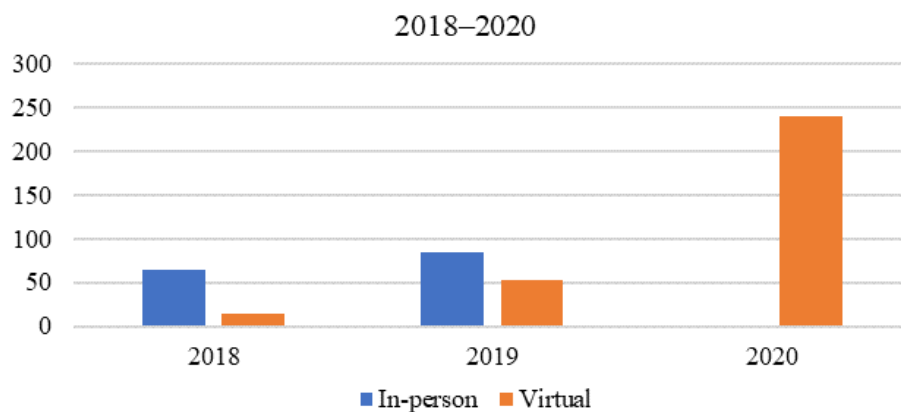
15. The technical cooperation strategy was officially communicated to International Trade Law Division staff in April 2019, through the 2019 review, at which time the use of the new non-legislative activities records system became mandatory. It was further shared with the Legal Counsel and senior management in the Office of Legal Affairs during the 2020 Leadership Dialogue.

16. Furthermore, the International Trade Law Division conducted a self-evaluation of the technical cooperation strategy in January 2020 and found that the strategy and its application in the first year of operation resulted in the delivery of technical assistance only in cases in which: the relevance of such assistance to UNCITRAL work could be established; the delivery of the assistance was expected to be effective and efficient; and the assistance had the potential to be sustainable and have an impact. The self-evaluation further noted the need for some improvements in terms of generation and systematization of data to improve the implementation of the strategy, that is, by improving beneficiary feedback on the Division's delivery of technical cooperation activities to demonstrate a clear link between Division actions and beneficiary needs and satisfaction.

17. Three years after its promulgation, staff interviews from January 2022 suggested that although strategically focused annual workplans have not been developed as envisaged in the past two years owing to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the technical cooperation strategy guides the technical cooperation activities of the International Trade Law Division and has been mainstreamed into their planning, organization, delivery and evaluation. Staff interviews suggest that use of the technical cooperation strategy during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a new online and hybrid format to technical cooperation whereby the Division has been able to reach a larger number of participants. Indeed, while the delivery method has changed, the numbers of accessions and enactments of UNCITRAL texts has remained broadly consistent. However, the level of awareness of UNCITRAL texts has increased, as set out in the figure below, provided by the Division.

## Numbers of participants in UNCITRAL technical cooperation and assistance activities

(in thousands)



Source: Office of Legal Affairs reports.

18. The International Trade Law Division estimates that, in addition, approximately 1,400 government officials per year are provided with capacity-building tools on UNCITRAL texts, largely through online tools. In view of these positive results, OIOS encourages the Division to continue to ensure that its work is relevant and effective by migrating the records system to a database and undertaking ongoing reviews and updates of the technical cooperation strategy.

19. On the basis of the above, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented.

### Recommendation 2

#### Review of standard operating procedures

20. Recommendation 2 reads as follows:

The Office should review all processes and available standard operating procedures across organizational units and functional areas to identify those processes that might require new or updated standard operating procedures. The Office should ensure that knowledge and institutional memory are captured to consistently support its work.

*Indicator of achievement:* standard operating procedures reviewed and issued across functional areas

21. In response to the recommendation, the Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit and Evaluation Working Group (see recommendations 3 and 4) engaged in an ongoing review to assess and determine which existing standard operating procedures could be the subject of review. They also identified processes that would benefit from the creation of new standard operating procedures. This was a participatory review that included all Divisions within the Office.

22. As a result of these efforts, two new standard operating procedures were issued:

(a) One entitled “Office of Legal Affairs support to criminal accountability processes at the United Nations”, which was issued in 2020 and was drafted by the Office of the Legal Counsel and General Legal Division. This standard operating procedure sets out the general steps to be followed by the Office of Legal Affairs in its provision of legal support to the United Nations in criminal accountability processes involving personnel of the United Nations;

(b) Another entitled “Office of Legal Affairs treaty publication”, which was issued in 2021 and was drafted by the Treaty Section. This standard operating procedure elaborates the process in relation to the publication of treaties and treaty actions registered or filed and recorded with the Secretariat for the United Nations Treaty Series under Article 102 of the Charter of the United Nations. In addition, two standard operating procedures were identified for review and updating and are being prioritized for issuance: an International Trade Law Division standard operating procedure on enhancing quality control and streamlining the preparation and submission of parliamentary documents for UNCITRAL and its working groups and a standard operating procedure for the record-keeping processes of the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

23. The ongoing process for the identification, update, elaboration and issuance of standard operating procedures in the Office of Legal Affairs had a significant impact on several aspects of the Office’s working methods. Staff interviews suggest that the review and issuance of standard operating procedures has served to document existing processes and working methods, to streamline certain aspects of these internal processes and evaluate their effectiveness, as well as to establish clear and concise chains of responsibility regarding critical areas of work that involve more than one Office division.

24. On the basis of the above, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented.

### **Recommendation 3**

#### **Formal mechanisms for information-sharing across functional areas**

25. Recommendation 3 reads as follows:

The Office should establish formal mechanisms for information-sharing across functional areas to discuss best practices and lessons learned across the Office, including on the best modalities of delivery and monitoring and evaluation practices.

*Indicator of achievement:* formal information-sharing mechanisms established

26. In response to the recommendation, the Office of Legal Affairs established the Evaluation Working Group in October 2019. The terms of reference of this Working Group notes that it serves as the principal forum for the exchange of best practices, lessons learned and standards on monitoring and evaluation, as well as for the discussion, development and sharing of methodologies, toolkits, templates and tools to support divisions in their assessment efforts. The Working Group undertakes the systematic and periodic assessment of stakeholder feedback on the delivery of the work of the Office, which allows for lessons learned and the sharing of best practices. During the review period, the Working Group met periodically in person or via Teams, as well as bilaterally in smaller groups to exchange information about ongoing evaluation activities in the Office, share best practices and lessons learned and provide training on evaluation, as called for by the recommendation. For example, to support the Office’s divisions in their self-evaluation efforts, the Working Group was kept apprised about internal self-evaluations and provided with best practice materials, toolkits, standards and templates developed by the United Nations Evaluation Group and was able to draw on support from the Evaluation Section of the Business Transformation and Accountability Division of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance.

27. In addition to the formal Working Group mechanism, as a best practice, the Office of Legal Affairs also established a segment on evaluation activities and best practices during the Leadership Dialogue held every year. The Leadership Dialogue is a mandatory, once-a-year meeting, chaired by the Legal Counsel and attended by



all heads of unit and directors. For example, for the October 2020 Leadership Dialogue, the International Trade Law Division self-evaluation of its technical cooperation strategy and the development of the new standard operating procedure on criminal accountability processes at the United Nations were presented and discussed. In addition, since 2019, the progress and developments related to monitoring and evaluation have been addressed and discussed during the mandatory annual Office of Legal Affairs town hall.

28. Staff interviews indicate that the Working Group continues to meet, albeit at times informally and bilaterally. Staff interviews further indicate that the formal mechanisms have increased Office of Legal Affairs capacity for information-sharing on evaluation information and has led to a strengthened evaluation culture in the Office and a deeper understanding of what monitoring and evaluation entails and the ways in which evaluation can support the Office in furthering its mandate. These mechanisms have also expanded Office opportunities to learn lessons and share best practices across the spectrum of its activities.

29. On the basis of the above, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented.

#### **Recommendation 4**

#### **Strengthening of monitoring and self-evaluation through the establishment of a dedicated mechanism**

30. Recommendation 4 reads as follows:

The Office should strengthen its monitoring and self-evaluation practices through the establishment of a dedicated mechanism at the senior level that periodically reviews performance, supported by a dedicated function that implements the Office's evaluation policy, workplans and efforts, by:

- (a) Developing and reviewing monitoring and self-evaluation methodologies, toolkits, templates and tools to support divisions in their assessment efforts;
- (b) Facilitating the periodic (quarterly) and systematic performance and results review to support management;
- (c) Supporting the self-evaluation efforts within the divisions, including the systematic and periodic assessment of stakeholder feedback and assessment surveys.

*Indicator of achievement:* functions and methodologies for monitoring and self-evaluation developed and established

31. In response to the recommendation, the Office of Legal Affairs created the Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit in 2019. The Unit reports directly to the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel and is responsible for implementing the Office's evaluation policy. As part of the strengthening of its self-evaluation practices, the Unit updated the Office's evaluation policy, which was approved by the Under-Secretary-General and came into effect in September 2020. The new evaluation policy was shared with all Office heads of unit and was further disseminated at the Office's Leadership Dialogue. The policy sets out the principles and norms to guide internal and self-evaluations in the Office; clarifies roles and responsibilities; provides guidance on evaluation planning and prioritizing; and explains how they are to be selected, budgeted and disclosed. It also articulates the functions and methodologies for monitoring and self-evaluation, as well as its coverage. In particular, the policy highlights that it applies to all Office activities, including projects funded with extrabudgetary funds. The policy further provides guidelines for selecting internal self-evaluations based on priority and relevance to

the Office's strategic goals and legislative mandates, with an emphasis on new policies or procedures and a review of cross-cutting or thematic issues as necessary and relevant. With respect to follow-up mechanisms, the policy further clarifies that all evaluations are to be systematically monitored and followed up and ensures that the recommendations are designated to a senior manager responsible for their implementation.

32. As per the policy, in furtherance of Office of Legal Affairs monitoring and self-evaluation practices, the role of the Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit is to support the development and review of monitoring and evaluation methodologies and practices, while also supporting units and divisions in their own assessment efforts. The Unit oversees the review and assessment of the Office processes in support of the Sustainable Development Goals and in developing its learning and evaluation strategy.

33. In fulfilment of this role, with respect to developing and reviewing monitoring and self-evaluation methodologies, toolkits, templates and tools to support assessment efforts, the Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit developed a standard template for internal evaluations and self-evaluations. The Unit relied upon and shared United Nations Evaluation Group resources, toolkits, templates and manuals to support the Office of Legal Affairs in this regard. In that respect, the Office, through the efforts of the Unit, became a full member of the United Nations Evaluation Group in January 2022. Prior to that, the Unit had been an active observer at Group meetings and participated in several working groups, including the group that revised the Group's ethical guidelines for evaluation, the group on evaluating policy and normative work and the gender and disability inclusion working group.

34. The Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit also assisted in systematic performance reviews of Office of Legal Affairs activities to support management by facilitating stakeholder feedback and assessment services and provided this support in line with the needs of each unit. Specifically, the Unit supported the Office's divisions by requesting feedback from Member States and stakeholders through surveys, questionnaires and bilateral discussions after training and capacity-building exercises or after International Law Commission meetings. This feedback was used by programme managers in their own internal self-assessments. In addition, the Unit coordinated the established segment on information-sharing related to evaluation activities during the annual Leadership Dialogue and town hall meeting and met frequently with the Under-Secretary-General to discuss its work on evaluation.

35. During the period under review, with the support of the Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit, Office of Legal Affairs divisions completed four self-evaluations: an evaluation by the International Trade Law Division in relation to the technical cooperation strategy on non-legislative activities; an evaluation by the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea assessing the coherence and relevance of coordination and cooperation between the United Nations, its agencies and other multilateral bodies in ocean affairs and the law of the sea; the evaluation by the General Legal Division on the support to the United Nations COVID-19 pandemic response; and an evaluation by the Treaty Section on treaty publications. These self-evaluations were spearheaded by the respective division-level Evaluation Working Group focal points (discussed in recommendation 3). The focal points were instrumental in supporting the assessments and assisted with substantive questions and facilitating input from stakeholders, including through interviews and designing interview protocols. Focal points from other divisions were encouraged to be involved in the process.

36. Staff interviews indicate that the updated evaluation policy has produced marked improvements in the quality of the Office of Legal Affairs evaluations. They further underscored a change in culture in the Office regarding evaluations, noting

that evaluations have allowed not only for the review of past practices but for the use of a live tool to reimagine processes and working methods in the Office.

37. On the basis of the above, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented.

### **Recommendation 6**

#### **Systematically review and assess fit-for-purpose in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals**

38. Recommendation 6 reads as follows:

The Office should more systematically review and assess whether it is fit for purpose in supporting the Sustainable Development Goals and the different changes and mandates that will ensue as a result of the United Nations reforms.

*Indicator of achievement:* Sustainable Development Goals and United Nations reforms reviewed and fully integrated into the workplan of the Office

39. In response to the recommendation, the Office of Legal Affairs established a working group on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2019. Its terms of reference were shared by the Under-Secretary-General with all Office heads of unit. The working group is the principal forum by which the Office integrates and promotes the Sustainable Development Goals. The working group comprises one focal point from each unit or division, and its stated primary role is to serve as the principal forum for sharing best practices, knowledge, opportunities and experiences on the integration and promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals in the work of the Office. It is further aimed at identifying possible partnerships and exploring potential opportunities in support of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The working group has been active since prior to the promulgation of its terms of reference, holding bilateral and group meetings to advance Sustainable Development Goal integration across the Office.

40. Since the Secretary-General's report and speech to the General Assembly on the theme of Our Common Agenda to accelerate achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in September 2021, the working group has focused on specific inputs to contribute to the processes related to the Sustainable Development Goals for which the Office of Legal Affairs has a specific capability and expertise, such as Goal 16 (on the rule of law), Goal 14 (on oceans) and Goal 8 (on economic growth). Working group members meet regularly to discuss the Office's contribution to the Secretary-General's vision. For example, the Office's contribution to Goal 16 can be found in the Secretary-General's report on the rule of law ([A/76/235](#)), which covers capacity-building in oceans affairs and law of the sea and 33 legislative actions with respect to UNCITRAL texts, including one on accession to the United Nations Convention on Transparency in Treaty-based Investor-State Arbitration.

41. The working group has been instrumental in ensuring that the Sustainable Development Goals have been increasingly reflected in the proposed programme budgets for the Office of Legal Affairs. For example, as compared to the 2018 proposed programme budget, the 2020 version more clearly incorporates the Sustainable Development Goals into the workplans of relevant Divisions.

42. On the basis of the above, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented.

**Recommendation 7**

**Fill vacancies by selecting candidates from rosters**

43. Recommendation 7 reads as follows:

The Office should quickly fill vacancies by selecting candidates from rosters. It should build rosters of attorneys and staff on all thematic areas by identifying qualified candidates.

*Indicator of achievement:* updated and available rosters and reduction of vacancy rates across divisions

44. In response to the recommendation, the Office of Legal Affairs has updated all rosters at each professional level on a continual basis whenever a process was concluded in Inspira. The freeze on recruitment imposed on all regular budget posts in 2020 had a significant impact on the Office. However, the freeze was relaxed in May 2021, leading to recruitment processes and an improved vacancy rate.

45. As of January 2022, the vacancy rate across professional staff categories in the Office of Legal Affairs was 7.5 per cent, a reduction from the 9 per cent noted at the time of the 2019 OIOS evaluation. Specifically, there were two vacancies in the Codification Division, two in the Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, one in the International Trade Law Division and two in the General Legal Division, for a total of seven vacancies in the professional category (as compared to 11 professional category vacancies in the 2019 evaluation).

46. On the basis of the above, OIOS considers this recommendation implemented.

### **III. Conclusion**

47. The Office of Legal Affairs took important steps to implement the six recommendations in the evaluation, which led to several positive outcomes. A technical cooperation strategy was developed and operationalized and has been mainstreamed into all International Trade Law Division planning, organization, delivery and evaluation of technical cooperation activities. Two new standard operating procedures were issued, and an additional two identified for review and updating. Formal mechanisms for information-sharing on monitoring and evaluation and on the Sustainable Development Goals have been established across functional areas. Monitoring and evaluation has been strengthened in the Office through the issuance of a revised evaluation policy and the establishment of an Evaluation Working Group and an Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit. Office activities in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals were facilitated by the working group on the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Goals were fully integrated into the programme budget for the Office. In addition, the vacancy rate has been reduced overall and across divisions.

**Annex\*****Comments received from the Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs and United Nations Legal Counsel**

1. This refers to your memo of 8 March 2022 (OIOS-2022-00322) by which you transmitted the draft report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the triennial review of the OIOS on the implementation of OIOS recommendations in the report on the evaluation of the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) (E/AC.51/2019/9) for our review and formal comments.
2. We have reviewed the draft report, and after some exchanges between the Inspection and Evaluation Division (IED) in OIOS and the Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit in my Office on the implementation of the recommendations made by OIOS in 2019, we are pleased to inform you that we agree with the results of the review reflected in the draft report.
3. OLA will continue to strive to respond to the needs of its stakeholders and beneficiaries with the valued specialized legal skill set, institutional memory, credibility and neutrality in delivering our mandate.
4. Reiterating the importance I have attached to strengthening OLA monitoring and evaluation practices, I would like to highlight the positive impact of the implementation of the recommendations in the consolidation of the monitoring and evaluation culture in OLA. The establishment of the Evaluation and Strategic Planning Unit in my office and the creation of the Evaluation Working Group have strengthened the Office's development and review of monitoring and evaluation methodologies and practices, demonstrated also by the review of the OLA evaluation policy, the evaluations performed and Standard Operating Procedures created during the period under review.
5. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Inspection and Evaluation Division of OIOS, in particular Mr. Juan Carlos Peña and his team, for their support during the period of the implementation and review of the referred recommendations. We greatly appreciate the time Mr. Peña and his team invested in OLA while my Office bolstered its monitoring and evaluation knowledge and capacities. We also appreciate the interactions with the IED team and especially Ms. Ines Kwan during the review of the implementation of the recommendations. We greatly valued their interactions with us throughout all the process and their openness to receive our input.

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\* In the present annex, the Office of Internal Oversight Services sets out the full text of comments received from the Office of Legal Affairs. The practice has been instituted in line with General Assembly resolution 64/263, following the recommendation of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee.