



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2016/152

Audit of archives and records
management in the United Nations
Mission in Liberia

Controls needed to be strengthened to
ensure effective management of archives
and records

13 December 2016
Assignment No. AP2016/626/04

Audit of archives and records management in United Nations Mission in Liberia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over archives and records management in the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The audit covered the period from 1 January 2015 to 30 June 2016 and included: (i) identification and completeness of vital records; (ii) condition of records storage facilities and stored records; (iii) management of electronic records; (iv) implementation of the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule (PORS); and (v) implementation of a sensitization programme for records management.

UNMIL initiated the sensitization of its staff on the importance of effective management of records, and provided training on records management to focal points. However, UNMIL needed to strengthen controls to ensure effective management of archives and records by: identifying vital records, improving management and safeguarding of records, and providing guidance on disposal of records.

OIOS made six important recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, UNMIL needed to:

- Develop and implement procedures to assist in the regular identification of vital records in the Mission;
- Implement minimum physical standards stipulated by the Archives and Records Management Section for the Mission's records storage facilities;
- Implement adequate oversight procedures on the completeness and accuracy of the Mission's records management database, conduct a complete inventory of all records in storage facilities and update the records management database accordingly;
- Develop guidance to address risks associated with the loss of important e-mail records;
- Develop, communicate and implement an electronic records management migration plan to ensure complete and accurate migration of all records currently held in shared drives; and
- Provide guidance to sections on applying PORS to their records and implement a verification mechanism to ensure all records are appraised and disposition dates and methods determined prior to transfer to records storage facilities.

UNMIL accepted the recommendations and has initiated steps to implement them.

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Audit of archives and records management in the United Nations Mission in Liberia

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of archives and records management in the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL).
2. The Secretary General's bulletin on recordkeeping and the management of United Nations archives (ST/SGB/2007/5) provides guidance on the creation, management and disposition of records, including electronic records. The Archives and Records Management Section (ARMS) in the Department of Management is responsible for establishing policy and setting standards for all aspects of United Nations recordkeeping
3. The UNMIL Information Management Unit (IMU) provides records management services for the Mission and is also responsible for: (i) training and creating awareness on best practices for records management; (ii) providing advice and guidance to staff on recordkeeping principles and standards; and (iii) regularly monitoring recordkeeping practices across all UNMIL sites/locations to ensure policies and guidelines are being adhered to and meet the Mission's needs. The Unit is headed by a Chief at the P-3 level, who is supported by six national staff and one United Nations volunteer with an annual staffing cost of \$396,000.
4. Comments provided by UNMIL are incorporated in italics.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

5. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of governance, risk management and control processes over UNMIL archives and records.
6. This audit was included in the 2016 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to the risk that inefficient and ineffective management of records in UNMIL during the drawdown phase could lead to loss or inaccessibility of important records.
7. OIOS conducted this audit in August and September 2016. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2015 to 30 June 2016. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered high and medium risks in the archives and records management in UNMIL, which included: (a) identification and completeness of vital records; (b) condition of record storage facilities and stored records; (c) management of electronic records; (d) implementation of the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule (PORS); and (e) implementation of a sensitization programme on records management.
8. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews of key personnel, (b) reviews of relevant documentation, (c) analytical reviews of data, (d) sample testing.

III. OVERALL CONCLUSION

9. UNMIL initiated the sensitization of its staff on the importance of effective management of records, and IMU, as part of its 2015/16 work plan, started to provide training on records management for newly appointed records management focal points. However, UNMIL needed to strengthen controls to ensure effective management of archives and records by: (a) developing and implementing procedures to

assist staff in identifying vital records; (b) improving physical conditions of the Mission's records storage facilities; (c) conducting a complete inventory of records in storage facilities and update the records management database; (d) addressing the risks associated with loss of important e-mails; (e) developing, communicating and implementing an electronic records management migration plan; and (f) providing guidance to sections on applying PORS to guide disposition of their records.

IV. AUDIT RESULTS

A. Identification and completeness of vital records

UNMIL needed to establish procedures to regularly identify vital records

10. The Secretary-General's bulletin on recordkeeping and the management of United Nations archives requires UNMIL to develop procedures to identify and manage vital records as part of overall disaster recovery and business continuity planning.

11. OIOS review of UNMIL's October 2015 Business Continuity Plan indicated that the Mission had identified its vital records and had established procedures to manage them in the event of a disaster. However, a comparison by OIOS of the list of UNMIL's vital records with the list of vital records identified in the July 2016 Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO)/Department of Field Support (DFS) Peacekeeping records retention schedule for field missions indicated that UNMIL's list did not include 9 of the 19 categories of vital records in its possession. This was because the Mission had not developed procedures to assist staff members in identifying vital records.

12. In the event of a disaster, records essential for the recovery and continuity of vital operations of the Mission may be unavailable and inaccessible.

(1) UNMIL should develop and implement procedures to assist in the regular identification of vital records in the Mission.

UNMIL accepted recommendation 1 and stated that it was drafting standard operating procedures (SOPs) on the identification and management of vital records, which would be finalized and disseminated by 15 December 2016. Recommendation 1 remains open pending finalization and receipt of evidence of implementation of SOPs.

UNMIL was taking action to conduct a complete survey of records in the Mission

13. As part of the vital records plan, ARMS Recordkeeping Toolkit requires the Mission to periodically re-survey its vital records to ensure that new or changed record series are covered. Accordingly, IMU is expected to conduct surveys to obtain an overview of the record holdings of each section in the Mission.

14. IMU had not conducted a complete records survey in the Mission, which was attributed to shortage of staff. Also, between January 2015 and June 2016, eight field offices, 11 United Nations Police (UNPOL) team sites, and five military observer team sites were closed as a result of the Mission's downsizing. IMU did not conduct record surveys of most of these offices prior to closure and therefore was not in a position to determine what records to expect for archiving and those to be transferred to other locations in the Mission. IMU staff stated that they visited two field offices, two military observer team sites and two UNPOL team sites to provide advice on how to prepare records for archiving, but did not provide any reports, survey forms or other forms of evidence of the work done.

15. OIOS review of archiving records transfer forms received by IMU from closed offices indicated that they had only received records from one of the eight closed field offices and 2 of the 11 closed UNPOL team sites. However, on enquiry, the Field Support Team indicated that records from four field offices had been transferred to IMU for archiving, while those from four field offices were still active and had therefore been transferred to other field offices that were still operational. Records for the five closed military observer team sites were all in electronic format and kept on a shared drive and thus did not require to be transferred for archiving as other paper records.

16. Failure to conduct records surveys diminished the ability of the Mission to adequately prepare its records for eventual liquidation and also increased the risk of records being lost or disposed of incorrectly.

17. UNMIL stated that due to staff shortages, IMU did not conduct any records surveys between December 2015 and May 2016. With the assumption of duty of a supervisor and hiring of three contractors, a mission-wide exhaustive records survey had been ongoing since 1 October 2016. In light of action taken by UNMIL, OIOS did not make a recommendation on this issue.

B. Condition of records storage facilities and management of stored records

UNMIL needed to improve the physical conditions at the Mission's records storage facilities.

18. ARMS Recordkeeping Toolkit requires IMU to have in place a records storage facility that meets specified physical standards to ensure records are not at risk of deterioration, unauthorized access and destruction by fire, flood or other disaster. These physical conditions include: (i) adequate security to prevent unauthorized access; (ii) temperatures at 18 degrees Celsius and relative humidity at 40-45 per cent; and (iii) shelving that has a top shelf acting as a roof and the bottom shelf at least 15 centimeters off the ground.

19. OIOS observations at the two records storage facilities in UNMIL indicated that access was restricted to authorized individuals, and facilities were fitted with smoke detectors and fire extinguishers to protect against the risk of fire. However, IMU did not prioritize regular checks of adequacy of records storage facilities, including monitoring of temperature and humidity levels as UNMIL did not have the relevant devices to measure such levels. In addition, boxes of records were stacked on the floor as well as the top shelves due to unavailability of shelving space. As a result of a leaking roof at the Starbase storage facility, at least one box of documents on the top shelf had been damaged.

20. Inability to meet minimum physical standards at the storage facilities could result in the deterioration or destruction of archived records.

(2) UNMIL should take action to implement minimum physical standards stipulated by the Archives and Records Management Section for the Mission's records storage facilities.

UNMIL accepted recommendation 2 and stated that it was taking steps to implement the minimum physical standards at records storage facilities in the Mission. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence that ARMS minimum physical standards have been implemented at the Mission's records storage facilities.

UNMIL needed to enhance the management of records at its storage facilities

21. The ARMS Recordkeeping Toolkit requires UNMIL to implement adequate control over the operation of Mission's records storage facilities to allow for easy retrieval of documents.

22. UNMIL had not implemented adequate controls over the records at the Mission's storage facilities. For example:

- (a) Due to inadequate oversight by IMU, the shelf locations of records had not been updated in the records management database since 2012. On 16 September 2016, OIOS requested the retrieval of a sample of 10 files but as at 30 September 2016, only 3 could be retrieved.
- (b) OIOS traced back 20 boxes from the two storage facilities to the database and noted that 1 of the 10 boxes at the headquarters facility and 4 of the 10 boxes in the Starbase facility were not recorded in the database.
- (c) A physical verification of records identified at least 50 boxes that did not have accession numbers, which are used to identify and maintain the records in the records management database.

23. Inadequate management of records at the storage facilities increased the risk of loss and inefficient retrieval of records.

(3) UNMIL should: (i) take action to implement adequate oversight procedures on the completeness and accuracy of the Mission's records management database; and (ii) conduct a complete inventory of all records in records storage facilities and update the records management database accordingly.

UNMIL accepted recommendation 3 and stated that it had since May 2016 begun implementing adequate oversight procedures of the Mission's records management database, as well as regularly updating the database. An inventory of all records in the records storage facility was ongoing and the records management database was being updated accordingly. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence that a complete inventory of records in records storage facilities has been completed and the records management database updated.

C. Management of electronic records

UNMIL needed to develop and implement an action plan for archiving e-mail records

24. The Secretary-General's bulletin on recordkeeping requires UNMIL to ensure that e-mail records are identified, managed and stored in accordance with the requirements for recordkeeping. This includes managing e-mail records of staff members who have left the organization.

25. OIOS review of records management practices in 8 out of 42 sections in UNMIL as well as discussions with IMU, indicated that e-mail records of separated staff members were not being retained for archiving due to the absence of procedures to identify, manage and store e-mail records. There was therefore a risk that important records and evidence of important decisions originating through e-mails could be lost.

(4) UNMIL should develop guidance to address the risks associated with the loss of important e-mail records.

UNMIL accepted recommendation 4 and stated that it would draft guidelines to staff on saving e-mail records, as well as a protocol to ensure that the e-mail records of separated staff can be accessed by UNMIL. Recommendation 4 remains open pending the development of guidance by UNMIL regarding archiving of e-mail records.

UNMIL needed to develop a migration plan for its electronic records

26. The DPKO/DFS SOP for Managing Information on Shared Drives requires UNMIL to develop a plan for the migration of records from shared drives to other systems.

27. UNMIL electronic records are currently managed on shared network drives. OIOS discussion with IMU indicated that UNMIL was anticipating the decommissioning of shared drives and introducing an electronic content management system by January 2017. As at 28 September 2016, UNMIL migration plan was in its initial stages. As per the SOP for Managing Information on Shared Drives, the migration plan would cover issues such as the clean-up of the shared drives, application of the records retention schedule, notification of all staff of the migration and their role in the process, and decisions on cut-off and migration dates.

28. In the absence of a migration plan, there was a risk of incomplete and inaccurate migration of records currently held in shared drives.

(5) UNMIL should develop, communicate and implement the electronic records management migration plan to ensure complete and accurate migration of all records currently held in shared drives.

UNMIL accepted recommendation 5 and stated that an SOP was being drafted on the migration plan, which would be finalized and disseminated by 31 January 2017. Recommendation 5 remains open pending finalization and receipt of evidence of implementation of the electronic records management migration plan.

D. Implementation of the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule

UNMIL needed to implement PORS to guide disposition of its records

29. The ARMS Recordkeeping Toolkit requires UNMIL to use PORS to guide the disposition of its records. The Toolkit provides that PORS should be applied right from when a record is created up to the end of the record's lifecycle.

30. A review of records management practices in 8 out of 42 sections in UNMIL indicated that due to inadequate guidance by IMU on how to use PORS, none of the sections reviewed was applying PORS to manage their records. The sections were packing and sending boxes of inactive records to IMU for archiving without determining how and when their records should be disposed of as per PORS. IMU was also transferring records to the Mission's storage facilities without applying PORS to determine the eventual disposal date and method. OIOS visits to the two records storage facilities noted that, due to insufficient space, some boxes needed to be stored on the floor contrary to ARMS minimum physical standards.

31. Non- or delayed application of PORS led to inconsistent disposal procedures for records throughout the Mission. This caused an accumulation of records that were due for destruction in both offices and records storage facilities, which could lead to overcrowding of office space or storage facilities with records that do not have any archival value.

(6) UNMIL should: (i) provide guidance to sections on applying the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule to their records; and (ii) implement a verification mechanism to ensure all records are appraised and disposal dates and methods determined prior to transfer to records storage facilities.

UNMIL accepted recommendation 6 and stated that an SOP on records management including PORS had been finalized and disseminated throughout the Mission. The Mission expected to train all records management focal points on the verification mechanism by 31 December 2016. Recommendation 6 remains open pending receipt of evidence that relevant staff have been trained on PORS and the verification mechanism to ensure compliance.

E. Implementation of sensitization programme for records management.

UNMIL initiated action to implement a sensitization programme for records management

32. The IMU 2015/16 work plan requires the Unit to provide training on records management for newly appointed records management focal points and refresher trainings every three months thereafter.

33. IMU, due to inadequate oversight, had not conducted any training on records management in the Mission during the audit period. OIOS review of records management practices in 8 out of 42 sections in UNMIL indicated a general lack of awareness of records management practices.

34. However on 25 August 2016, UNMIL broadcasted to all staff, an administrative instruction sensitizing them on the importance of ensuring the effective and efficient management of UNMIL records as outlined in the Secretary-General's bulletin on recordkeeping. The broadcast also included a manual with instructions on how and when sections should transfer records to UNMIL archives. Additionally, on 2 September 2016, UNMIL broadcasted another administration instruction requesting section chiefs to nominate focal points for training on records management. As at 27 September 2016, 13 out of the 42 sections had nominated focal points and the first training session for these focal points was conducted on 27 September 2016.

35. OIOS concluded that the Mission had initiated action to ensure UNMIL staff are aware of records management practices.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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

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Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of archives and records management in United Nations Mission in Liberia

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	C/ O ³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁴
1	UNMIL should develop and implement procedures to assist in the regular identification of vital records in the Mission.	Important	O	Submission of evidence that SOPs on the identification and management of vital records in the Mission have been finalized and implemented.	15 December 2016
2	UNMIL should take action to implement minimum physical standards stipulated by the Archives and Records Management Section for the Mission's records storage facilities.	Important	O	Submission of evidence of implementation of ARMS minimum physical standards at its records storage facilities.	15 December 2016
3	UNMIL should: (i) take action to implement adequate oversight procedures on the completeness and accuracy of the Mission's records management database; and (ii) conduct a complete inventory of all records in records storage facilities and update the records management database accordingly.	Important	O	Submission of evidence that a complete inventory of records in records storage facilities has been completed and the records management database updated accordingly	16 December 2016
4	UNMIL should develop guidance to address the risks associated with the loss of important e-mail records.	Important	O	Submission of guidance on archiving of e-mail records.	31 January 2017
5	UNMIL should develop, communicate and implement the electronic records management migration plan to ensure complete and accurate migration of all records currently held in shared drives.	Important	O	Submission of evidence that the electronic records management migration plan has been developed and implemented.	31 January 2017
6	UNMIL should: (i) provide guidance to sections on applying the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule to their records; and (ii) implement a verification mechanism to ensure all records are	Important	O	Submission of evidence that relevant staff have been trained on PORS and the verification mechanism to ensure compliance.	31 December 2016

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.

³ C = closed, O = open

⁴ Date provided by UNMIL in response to recommendations.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of archives and records management in United Nations Mission in Liberia

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	C/ O ³	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁴
	appraised and disposal dates and methods determined prior to transfer to records storage facilities.				

APPENDIX I

Management Response

Management Response

Audit of archives and records management in UNMIL

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNMIL should develop and implement procedures to assist in the regular identification of vital records in the Mission.	Important	Yes	Chief IMU	15 December 2016	UNMIL is drafting an SOP on the identification and management of vital records. The SOP will be finalized and disseminated by 15 December 2016.
2	UNMIL should take action to implement minimum physical standards stipulated by the Archives and Records Management Section for the Mission's records storage facilities.	Important	Yes	Chief IMU	15 December 2016	UNMIL is currently addressing the records storage facilities in the Mission in order to implement the minimum physical standards. UNMIL expects to implement this recommendation by 15 December 2016.
3	UNMIL should: (i) take action to implement adequate oversight procedures on the completeness and accuracy of the Mission's records management database; and (ii) conduct a complete inventory of all records in records storage facilities and update the records management database accordingly.	Important	Yes	Chief IMU	16 December 2016	(i) Since May 2016, UNMIL has taken action to implement adequate oversight procedures on the Mission's records management database as well as to regularly update it. (ii) An inventory of all records in records storage facilities is ongoing and the records management database is being updated accordingly. UNMIL expects to implement the recommendation by 16 December 2016.
4	UNMIL should develop guidance to address the risks associated with the loss	Important	Yes	Chief IMU	31 January 2017	UNMIL accepts the recommendation. UNMIL is using the Outlook

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.

Management Response

Audit of archives and records management in UNMIL

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
	of important e-mail records.					Exchange email server in Valencia, so all email traffic is recorded and archived in the UN Global Service Center. Backups are done on a daily incremental basis and full backups monthly. UNMIL will draft guidelines to staff on saving email records as well as a protocol to ensure that the email records of departed staff can be accessed by UNMIL.
5	UNMIL should develop, communicate and implement the electronic records management migration plan to ensure complete and accurate migration of all records currently held in shared drives.	Important	Yes	Chief IMU	31 January 2017	An SOP is being drafted on the migration plan; the SOP will be finalized and disseminated by 31 January 2017. A pilot program is currently ongoing with UNPOL records. All UNMIL shared drives should be decommissioned by 31 January 2017.
6	UNMIL should: (i) provide guidance to sections on applying the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule to their records; and (ii) implement a verification mechanism to ensure all records are appraised and disposition dates and methods determined prior to transfer to records storage facilities.	Important	Yes	Chief IMU	31 December 2016	(i) An SOP on records management including the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule has been finalized and disseminated throughout the Mission. (ii) In order to implement a verification mechanism, records management focal points are currently being trained on the procedures in the SOP. As of 2 November 2016, 30% of the focal

Management Response

Audit of archives and records management in UNMIL

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical¹/ Important²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
						points have been trained. UNMIL expects to have trained 100% of focal points by 31 December 2016.