



INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

REPORT 2015/119

Audit of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response

Overall results relating to effective management of United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response operations were initially assessed as partially satisfactory. Management has satisfactorily addressed the identified issues.

FINAL OVERALL RATING: SATISFACTORY

14 October 2015
Assignment No. AH2015/510/01

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AUDIT REPORT

Audit of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response

I. BACKGROUND

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER).

2. In accordance with its mandate, OIOS provides assurance and advice on the adequacy and effectiveness of the United Nations internal control system, the primary objectives of which are to ensure: (a) efficient and effective operations; (b) accurate financial and operational reporting; (c) safeguarding of assets; and (d) compliance with mandates, regulations and rules.

3. UNMEER was established on 19 September 2014 following the adoption of General Assembly resolution 69/1. The main objective of the Mission was to provide leadership and operational direction to manage the outbreak of Ebola in West Africa until the virus no longer posed a grave threat to the people of the infected countries. UNMEER was headed by a Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) and Head of Mission who led the emergency response at the operational level and provided operational direction to the United Nations system entities and other implementing partners on the ground. The Special Envoy on Ebola provided strategic leadership to the global Ebola response and enhanced coordination of the United Nations system, including UNMEER and other partners. Ebola Crisis Managers led the crisis response teams in each of the countries affected (Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) to ensure that the responses to Ebola by United Nations system entities and the actions of other partners and players were aligned at the country level.

4. UNMEER was an emergency mission that faced many challenges including in preparing its budget and recruiting staff. Special measures in the areas of recruitment, procurement and property management were granted to facilitate the Mission's start-up and operations. In November 2014, the Secretary-General proposed a total budget of \$189 million for the Office of the Special Envoy on Ebola and UNMEER for the period 19 September 2014 to 31 December 2015. The proposed budget was limited to the functions of UNMEER and the Office of the Special Envoy in response to the Ebola crisis. However, the General Assembly did not approve the budget and requested the Secretary-General to resubmit a more detailed budget proposal. On 29 December 2014, the General Assembly approved a commitment authority of up to \$104 million that included an initially approved commitment of \$49 million. In March 2015, the Secretary-General submitted the revised budget of \$88 million for the period 19 September 2014 to 31 August 2015, which at the time of the audit was under review by the governing bodies. The revised budget was 53 per cent lower than the previous proposed budget due to the improved Ebola situation in the affected countries and an earlier phase-out of the mission than initially planned.

5. The initial budget proposal included 376 posts of which 280 were filled as of 28 February 2015. The revised budget proposal in March 2015 included 318 posts, gradually reduced to 56 posts by August 2015 due to the planned phasing out of the Mission. An additional 10 posts were proposed for the Office of the Special Envoy for September to December 2015. Total expenditure as of 31 March 2015 was \$63 million.

6. Having achieved its core objective of scaling up the response on the ground and establishing unity of purpose among responders in support of the nationally led efforts to end the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, UNMEER was closed on 31 July 2015.

7. Comments provided by the Department of Field Support (DFS) are incorporated in *italics*.

II. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE

8. The audit was conducted to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of UNMEER governance, risk management and control processes in providing reasonable assurance regarding the **effective management of UNMEER operations**.

9. The audit was included in the 2015 OIOS risk-based work plan due to the operational and financial risks relating to the first-ever United Nations emergency health mission. Furthermore, the audit was requested by the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG).

10. The key controls tested for the audit were: (a) governance and monitoring mechanisms; and (b) regulatory framework. For the purpose of this audit, OIOS defined these key controls as follows:

(a) **Governance and monitoring mechanisms** - controls that provide reasonable assurance that adequate and effective processes are established to guide the planning, direction, coordination, execution and oversight of UNMEER activities and to monitor and report on the results.

(b) **Regulatory framework** - controls that provide reasonable assurance that policies and procedures: (i) exist to guide the operations of UNMEER; (ii) are implemented consistently; and (iii) ensure the reliability and integrity of financial and operational information.

11. The key controls were assessed for the control objectives shown in Table 1. One control objective (shown in Table 1 as “Not assessed”) was not relevant to the scope defined for this audit.

12. OIOS conducted this audit from March to May 2015. The audit covered the period from September 2014 to April 2015.

13. OIOS conducted an activity-level risk assessment to identify and assess specific risk exposures, and to confirm the relevance of the selected key controls in mitigating associated risks. Through interviews, analytical reviews and tests of controls, OIOS assessed the existence and adequacy of internal controls and conducted necessary tests to determine their effectiveness.

III. AUDIT RESULTS

14. The UNMEER governance, risk management and control processes examined were initially assessed as **partially satisfactory**¹ in providing reasonable assurance regarding the **effective management of UNMEER operations**. OIOS made two recommendations to address issues identified in the audit. The Secretary-General established adequate and effective organizational structure and reporting lines to manage the Ebola crisis. UNMEER took action to revise its budget based on improved information. The Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) granted exceptional measures to UNMEER to facilitate the rapid recruitment and deployment of personnel to the Mission. The effectiveness of the exceptional measures needed to be reviewed to determine how they could be enhanced for future emergency missions. Additionally, DFS needed to establish a system to ensure that

¹ A rating of “**partially satisfactory**” means that important (but not critical or pervasive) deficiencies exist 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.

responses to expressions of interest for positions to be filled in emergency situations were reviewed and processed. The special delegation of procurement authority was effectively used to acquire goods and services for UNMEER. The controls over UNMEER quick-impact and grant projects funded by Multi-Partner Trust Fund were adequate.

15. The initial overall rating was based on the assessment of key controls presented in Table 1 below. The final overall rating is **satisfactory**, as management has satisfactorily addressed the identified issues.

Table 1:
Assessment of key controls

Business objective	Key controls	Control objectives			
		Efficient and effective operations	Accurate financial and operational reporting	Safeguarding of assets	Compliance with mandates, regulations and rules
Effective management of UNMEER operations	(a) Governance and monitoring mechanisms	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not assessed	Satisfactory
	(b) Regulatory framework	Partially satisfactory	Partially satisfactory	Satisfactory	Partially satisfactory
FINAL OVERALL RATING: SATISFACTORY					

A. Governance and monitoring mechanisms

Adequate and effective organizational structure and reporting lines were established

16. The Secretary-General was expected to establish the organizational structure and reporting lines necessary to plan, execute and report on the activities of UNMEER.

17. EOSG set up a high level arrangement for the Organization, Reporting and Oversight of the Office of the Special Envoy and UNMEER. This arrangement required the Special Envoy and SRSG to report to the Secretary-General on a regular basis. Day-to-day issues and matters pertaining to UNMEER were reported through the Chef de Cabinet. Furthermore, to assist in full visibility, accountability and oversight of the Ebola operations, the Chef de Cabinet chaired regular weekly/bi-weekly meetings with UNMEER.

18. UNMEER organized an operational conference for scaling up the United Nations-system approach to the Ebola response in Accra, Ghana in October 2014. In order to ensure united action for the Ebola response, the conference assigned the responsibility of lead agency for four Lines of Actions² and five Enabling Activities³ to specific organizations (World Health Organization, International Federation of Red Cross, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme, United Nations Development Programme and UNMEER). Accordingly, each Organization led its respective component to manage the Ebola crisis. The Secretary-General reported monthly to the General Assembly on the work of the United Nations in response to the Ebola outbreak. In February 2015, UNMEER also established an Ebola

² Lines of Actions – These comprised: (i) Case finding, laboratories and contract tracing; (ii) Case management; (iii) Safe and dignified burial; and (iv) Community engagement and social mobilization.

³ Enabling Activities – These comprised: (i) Logistics; (ii) Cash payment; (iii) Personnel and volunteer; (iv) Training; and (v) Information management.

Response Coordination Board comprising six members that included senior officials from the World Health Organization, United Nations Children’s Fund, World Food Programme and International Federation of Red Cross to provide strategic guidance on the Ebola response. The Coordination Board met each month in one of the Ebola affected countries and followed up on action points for the meetings.

19. OIOS concluded that adequate and effective organizational structures, reporting lines and related mechanisms were established and implemented to manage UNMEER.

UNMEER took action to revise its budget based on improved information

20. The United Nations regulations and rules governing programme planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation required the Secretary-General to submit programme budgets that include data on the resources required to implement activities at an appropriate level of detail.

21. UNMEER, considering its nature and that it was the first Mission of its type, faced challenges in estimating its resource requirements. In October 2014, UNMEER developed a budget of \$189,590,900 for the period 19 September 2014 to 31 December 2015. The budget was based on assumptions agreed during the Operational Framework conference held in Ghana regarding an infection rate of 10,000 cases per week, possibly reaching a total of over 1 million cases for the period to 31 December 2015, if the crisis continued unmitigated. However, on the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, the General Assembly authorized the Secretary-General to enter into a commitment authority for \$104,582,400 for a period from 19 September 2014 until 30 June 2015 (resolution 69/263) pending provision of detailed information and clarifications requested by the Committee.

22. The initial assumptions/projections made on the spread of the Ebola virus were high and were based on information provided by competent authorities at the time. Due to the various initiatives undertaken by governments, UNMEER, United Nations entities and other implementing partners, the spread of the Ebola virus was controlled. As at 1 March 2015 (150-day mark), UNMEER reported that there were 23,969 confirmed, probable and suspected cases and 9,807 deaths reported. As a result, UNMEER reassessed its resource requirements, downsized its staff and started transitioning certain operational functions to the United Nations Country Teams. In March 2015, the Mission submitted a revised budget of \$88,094,000 for the period from 19 September 2014 to 31 August 2015. This budget was based on UNMEER operations being closed in Liberia by end of May 2015 and in Guinea and Sierra Leone by end of July 2015. The new budget request was lower by \$101 million (53 per cent) as the Mission took into consideration the declining rate of the infection and the related reduction in required resources. OIOS concluded that UNMEER took necessary actions to revise its budget based on the availability of improved information.

B. Regulatory framework

The exceptional measures on human resources needed to be reviewed to make them more effective in the future

23. OHRM granted exceptional measures⁴ to UNMEER to facilitate the rapid recruitment and deployment of personnel to support the achievement of the Mission’s objectives. The exceptional

⁴ These comprised: (i) issuance of temporary appointments, assignments and reimbursable loans of staff from United Nations common system Organizations to qualified candidates up to six months with no requirement for the publication of temporary job opening with the possibility of further extension based on operational exigencies and satisfactory performance; (ii) reduction in the mandatory break in service to two weeks for staff members selected

measures were requested by DFS, which assisted the Mission in hiring staff. Additionally, the guidelines of the International Civil Service Commission called for, among other things, a reasonable correlation of conditions of service for staff of organizations in the United Nations common system.

a. Delays in recruiting staff

24. In December 2014, more than two months after its establishment, UNMEER had 124 vacant posts (33 per cent of 368 posts) including 77 posts that were critical to the Mission's core mandate, for which no suitable candidates had been identified. Fifty-five of the vacancies were in the Emergency Operations and Emergency Operations Support pillars, which constituted the core mandate of the Mission. The staffing challenges were periodically reported in the meetings chaired by Chef de Cabinet. The delay in filling the posts was partly attributed to: (i) the absence of a civilian stand-by capacity; (ii) the fact that the six month contracts that were being offered were not attractive as they limited some of the incentives related to reassignments (such as reduced assignment and relocation grants, no mobility count, and no installation of dependents in Accra); and (iii) the fear of getting infected with the disease in the affected Ebola countries. The Mission supplemented its requirements with personnel on temporary duty assignments from DFS, non-reimbursable loan agreements and reimbursable loan agreements from the World Food Programme and the World Health Organization. DFS commented that the vacancy rate of 33 per cent after two months of the establishment of UNMEER was comparable to other vacancy rates in a surge environment. Furthermore, a number of positions were no longer required to be filled as other responders were mobilizing similar capacity.

b. Lack of harmonization of benefits and entitlements

25. Staff deployed in UNMEER from various agencies in the United Nations common system had different entitlements depending upon the loaning organization. At the start of UNMEER, the United Nations Secretariat did not have the talent pool to draw on for critical positions in the areas of community engagement, case finding, case management, and safe burial to enable it to deliver on its core mandate. Therefore the Mission relied heavily on candidates from United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes. The Inter-organization agreement concerning the transfer, secondment or loan of staff among the organizations applying the United Nations common system of salaries and allowances was used as the contractual basis to engage staff from these institutions. Under this arrangement, 52 staff members mainly from the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organization were appointed as community engagement officers, case finding officers, safe burial officers, field crisis managers and information management officers.

26. A review of the case files of 19 of the 52 staff on loan showed there were differences in entitlements between the staff from United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes and staff from the Secretariat as follows:

- i. Nineteen of the 52 staff on loan to UNMEER from Agencies, Funds and Programmes were appointed to higher positions on promotion;
- ii. Staff members of the United Nations Secretariat performing higher level functions in UNMEER were appointed at their current grade due to eligibility restrictions stipulated in the administrative instruction on special post allowance for field mission staff. Since none of United Nations

who have reached the maximum duration on a temporary appointment; (iii) waiver for national professional Officers with specific expertise required by UNMEER that is difficult to acquire; and (iv) waiver of the six month break in service for United Nations Volunteers. However, candidates selected must meet the academic and work experience requirement for the position.

Secretariat staff had the required service period with UNMEER, they were not eligible to receive a special post allowance;

- iii. The agreement with some of the organizations required additional entitlements to be paid to the staff on loan to UNMEER. For example: the World Food Programme required that daily subsistence allowance be paid to all eight of its staff on loan to UNMEER for the entire duration of service. Secretariat staff on service to UNMEER were entitled to 30 days daily subsistence allowance; and
- iv. The service of each of the loaned staff in UNMEER was counted as active service in the respective releasing organizations and counted for mobility purposes. The service of the United Nations Secretariat staff in UNMEER was counted as active service with the Secretariat, but did not count for mobility purposes.

27. The exceptional measures did not provide guidelines for harmonizing the conditions of service of staff serving with UNMEER. This may have, in some cases, led to higher costs for the Mission. In addition, the differences in some entitlements may have affected the morale of some staff. However, DFS commented that exceptional measures proved beneficial in ensuring the necessary responsiveness to the staffing needs of UNMEER.

28. These issues limited the effectiveness of exceptional measures on human resources in facilitating the rapid recruitment of staff.

(1) DFS should assess the exceptional measures requested for UNMEER to determine whether they need to be enhanced to be more effective in facilitating the recruitment of staff for future emergency missions.

DFS accepted recommendation 1 and stated that it had conducted a preliminary assessment of the exceptional measures and determined that more could have been accomplished if the measures had been stronger and if the concept of standing special measures had been institutionalized. With regard to the issue of different entitlements, in the future, DFS would also request to include secondment arrangements without the issuance of job openings as part of the exceptional measures. This would allow deployment of staff from United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes under the same conditions of service as Secretariat staff. Based on the information provided by DFS, recommendation 1 has been closed.

Processes followed for selecting candidates needed to be adequately documented

29. The administrative instruction on the staff selection system defined the prescreening and assessment processes for recruitment. It also required hiring managers to evaluate the academic qualifications and work experience of candidates and prepare reasoned and documented records of such evaluations.

30. A review of 37 of the 161 staff selected on temporary assignment, temporary appointment, reassignment and secondment over the period from 19 September 2014 to 28 February 2015 showed that some of the recruitment case files did not contain adequate documentation to demonstrate how the academic qualifications and work experience of candidates were evaluated. Only the files from one of the Ebola affected countries included requests addressed to the UNMEER SRSG to approve selection decisions. UNMEER explained it could not document all related information in the recruitment files due to the dynamic surge deployment process. Candidates were identified from multiple sources including expressions of interest and referrals from peacekeeping and political missions as well as from

offices/departments of the United Nations. Additionally, staff involved in the recruitment process had returned to their duty stations and some of the communications through their UNMEER email accounts were not retained. UNMEER stated that it would endeavor to have more complete files in place before it closed.

31. DFS commented that the requirement to obtain SRSG approval of selection decisions was instituted by the Mission's Headquarters; however various challenges resulted in some gaps in the completeness of records in the files. Responding to OIOS identification of incomplete files, UNMEER was mostly successful in retrieving supporting documents to complete the specific files.

32. At the beginning of the Mission, 94 staff members were deployed to UNMEER on temporary duty assignments. As such staff could not remain on travel status for more than 90 days, a call for more applicants was posted in iSeek requiring responses not later than 23 December 2014. This was in addition to an earlier message, calling for expressions of interest that had gone out to various entities within the Secretariat and United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes. About 9,000 applications and expressions of interest were received from the two initiatives. A review of the relevant publications in iSeek and handling of the responses received indicated that:

- a) Neither DFS nor UNMEER had records to show how the overwhelming responses received were reviewed, and how many of the suitable candidates were identified and selected. UNMEER stated that only a few selections were made from the various applications and expressions of interest; and
- b) The publication in iSeek only listed vacancies/positions to be filled and did not have specific terms of reference describing the positions, roles, responsibilities and the required skills and competencies. The publication also did not give any indication of the benefits and working conditions related to the service in UNMEER. Terms of reference were necessary given the special nature of the Mission. UNMEER indicated that the expressions of interest were targeting staff members of the United Nations common system who were aware of terms and conditions, and benefits associated with the Mission's assignments.

33. Inadequate documentation on the evaluation of candidates reduced the transparency of the recruitment process. Also, lack of evidence to demonstrate that DFS and UNMEER had given attention to responses to requests for expressions of interest for surge recruitment might diminish staff members' interest to participate in future exercises.

(2) DFS should establish a system to ensure that adequate documentation is retained regarding recruitment exercises and that responses to expressions of interest for positions to be filled in emergency situations are reviewed and processed.

DFS accepted recommendation 2 and stated that in the future, DFS would target requests for expressions of interest to staff/institutions with the necessary expert knowledge required for the specialized positions. In addition, DFS would work to strengthen relationships with specialized agencies so that the Department might utilize their rosters. A targeted outreach campaign rather than a general expression of interest would also help to ensure that adequate documentation of the recruitment exercise was retained. Based on the information provided by DFS, recommendation 2 has been closed.

Delays in medical clearances were addressed

34. The administrative instruction on the administration of temporary appointments required all candidates to receive medical clearance prior to issuance of appointment letters to ensure they were physically and medically fit to perform the designated functions and did not pose a risk to the safety and health of themselves and to others.

35. All staff selected to serve in UNMEER were requested to obtain medical clearance. In this regard, the Medical Services Division received 190 requests from staff appointed to serve in UNMEER between 17 October 2014 and 6 March 2015. The average time taken to grant each medical clearance was 6.7 days from the date the request was received. However, DFS expressed concerns that the deployment of staff at the inception of the Mission was significantly delayed as a result of medical clearance requirements and procedures.

36. The Medical Services Division explained that in the beginning there were some delays in the medical clearance process largely due to the submission of incomplete documentation, including vaccination records. The Medical Services Division wanted to ensure that staff members had the required vaccinations before deployment. The Division implemented procedures in early November 2014 to expedite medical clearances for all staff travelling to UNMEER. This included the Medical Services Division giving UNMEER candidates priority consideration. In view of the action taken to expedite medical clearances, OIOS did not make a recommendation on the issue.

UNMEER deployed 330 vehicles as part of its operational enabling activities

37. According to its proposed programme budget (A/69/590), UNMEER planned to provide around 380 vehicles for use by United Nations Agencies, Funds and Programmes and international and national non-governmental organizations operating in the three affected countries. To support the expedited distribution of United Nations property to entities not funded from assessed contributions, the Assistant Secretary-General of the Office of Central Support Services (OCSS) exceptionally authorized UNMEER to periodically present disposal cases of property having individual book value of \$100,000 or below to the Headquarters Property Survey Board on an ex post facto basis for review and advice.

38. The Mission donated 86 vehicles between October 2014 and April 2015 to various organizations operating in the affected countries. UNMEER explained that the lower number of vehicles donations were due to: (i) the expiration of the special delegation of authority for property management after the departure of the first SRSG on 2 January 2015. The delegation of authority to the succeeding SRSG was issued on 27 February 2015 after UNMEER requested it on 24 February 2015; and (ii) the recognition that some entities involved in the fight against Ebola virus did not intend to remain in the affected countries for a long period of time and would stop operations after the virus was under control. Therefore, UNMEER decided to only provide vehicles on loan basis. Consequently, 244 vehicles were loaned to various agencies after signing memoranda of understanding which indemnified the United Nations. At the time of the audit, UNMEER had submitted disposal cases for 66 of the 86 donated vehicles for the review and advice of the Headquarters Property Survey Board. Those cases were resubmitted on 22 July 2015 and were yet to be reviewed.

39. OIOS concluded that UNMEER took action to deploy vehicles largely as planned.

The special delegation of procurement authority was effectively used to acquire goods and services for UNMEER

40. The delegation of procurement authority for emergency situations to the Director of Procurement Division exceptionally authorized him to enter into individual contracts above \$300,000 for amounts not exceeding an initial cumulative value of \$10 million (subsequently increased to \$50 million) without prior review of the Headquarters Committee on Contracts (HCC). As per the requirement of special delegation authority, the Director of Procurement Division would submit reports to the Assistant Secretary-General, OCSS every 72 hours on the total awards made using the special delegation.

41. The Procurement Division submitted a total of 26 reports, which contained a summary of award and a spreadsheet containing detailed information of these awards. The cases above \$300,000 were submitted for HCC review on ex post facto basis. HCC reviewed these cases and took note of the awards.

42. The audit selected seven procurement actions with total not-to-exceed amount of \$41 million (out of contracts amounting to \$63 million awarded by the Procurement Division) for detailed review that included both special and normal delegation of authority. The review indicated that the Procurement Division generally exercised options available in existing contracts including systems contract, to acquire the goods and services for UNMEER requirements using its normal delegation of authority, and exercised the special delegation to meet urgent requirements on an as needed basis. OIOS concluded that adequate controls were implemented in exercising the special delegation of procurement authority in relation to the acquisition of goods and services for UNMEER.

Adequate controls were exercised over quick impact and grant funds projects

43. UNMEER was expected to design and implement appropriate guidelines on approving, implementing, monitoring and reporting on quick impact projects (QIPs), and to disburse funds to implementing partners in a timely manner.

44. UNMEER produced comprehensive guidelines to plan, implement and monitor the Ebola Response QIPs. The guidelines required the Ebola Crisis Managers in the affected countries to approve the projects and sign a Memorandum of Understanding with each implementing partner stipulating various terms for executing the projects. The implementing partners were required to submit a signed list of expenditures supported with original receipts. A completed monitoring form was also to be forwarded to the Chief of Mission Support who would authorize instalment payments. Any unspent amounts were to be returned to UNMEER.

45. By December 2014, UNMEER had received from the Multi Partner Trust Fund a total of \$3 million for QIPs and \$3.7 million for specifically approved grant projects. As of 9 April 2015, 65 per cent of the QIPs funds and 54 per cent of the grant funds had been allocated. OIOS selected six QIPs with total disbursed amount of \$522,749 in three Ebola affected countries. These projects were approved by Ebola Crisis Managers in each country. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed with implementing partners and accordingly the funds were disbursed to the implementing partners on the recommendation of UNMEER Country Office. OIOS also selected a grant project in Sierra Leone for which \$268,405 had been disbursed. In most of the cases funds were disbursed during late January to late March 2015, therefore the projects were ongoing at the time of the audit and expenditure statements along with original receipts and project completion reports were yet to be submitted. With the closing of UNMEER, remaining funds would be returned to the Multi Partner Trust Fund. OIOS concluded that there were adequate controls over the approval, disbursement and monitoring of QIPs and grant funds and projects.

IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

46. OIOS wishes to express its appreciation to the Management and staff of UNMEER, DFS, and the Department of Management for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

(Signed) David Kanja
Assistant Secretary-General, Acting Head
Office of Internal Oversight Services

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Audit of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Critical ⁵ / Important ⁶	C/ O ⁷	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ⁸
1	DFS should assess the exceptional measures requested for UNMEER to determine whether they need to be enhanced to be more effective in facilitating the recruitment of staff for future emergency missions.	Important	C	Action completed.	Implemented
2	DFS should establish a system to ensure that adequate documentation is retained regarding recruitment exercises and that responses to expressions of interest for positions to be filled in emergency situations are reviewed and processed.	Important	C	Action completed.	Implemented

⁵ Critical recommendations address significant and/or pervasive deficiencies or weaknesses in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

⁶ Important recommendations address important deficiencies or weaknesses in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

⁷ C = closed, O = open

⁸ Date provided by DFS in response to recommendations.

APPENDIX I

Management Response

CONFIDENTIAL

Immediate

TO: Ms. Eleanor T. Burns, Director
A: Internal Audit Division, OIOS

DATE: 24 September 2015

THROUGH:
S/C DE:

REFERENCE: UNHQ-AR-BOI-Memo-2-
2015-5673

FROM: Anthony Banbury, Assistant Secretary-General
DE: for Field Support



SUBJECT: **Audit of United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response**
OBJET: **(Assignment No. AH2015/510/01)**

1. I refer to your memorandum dated 24 August 2015 regarding the above-mentioned audit. Please find herewith our comments on the findings and recommendations contained in the draft report attached as Annexes I and II.
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 Castillo

Draft report on an audit of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (Assignment No. AH2015/510/01)

Delays in recruiting staff (paragraph 26)

1. The vacancy rate of 33 per cent after two months of the establishment of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response (UNMEER) is comparable to other vacancy rates in a surge environment. The Mission was supplemented with personnel on temporary duty assignments (TDYs), non-reimbursable loan agreements (NRLAs) and reimbursable loan agreements (RLAs) from the World Food Programme and World Health Organization (WHO). Such personnel filled the gaps while recruitment actions were being undertaken for positions under the Emergency Operations pillar. The vacancy rate of 33 per cent is also overstated as it became clear later that there were positions in the staffing table which were not being shown as encumbered, and which later on translated into reimbursable loan agreements with Agencies, Fund and Programmes (AFPs), e.g. WHO. In other instances there were not a requirement to fill positions as other responders were mobilising similar capacity and for UNMEER to have done so may have resulted in the duplication of effort.

Process followed for selecting candidates needed to be adequately documented (paragraphs 32-35)

2. Reference is made to the statement by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in paragraph 33 of the draft report: “*Only the files of one of the Ebola affected countries included requests addressed to the UNMEER SRSG to approve selection decisions.*” UNMEER wishes to clarify that this practice was actually instituted by the Mission’s Headquarters to be applied systematically throughout all of the countries. The file referred to by OIOS was presented as evidence for one of the countries which OIOS was not able to visit during their audit. It is however acknowledged that the tempo of operations and focus on filling positions to respond to the emergency combined with the small size of the human resources team and high turnover of its members, did result in some gaps in the completeness of records in the files. During the audit, and responding to OIOS’ identification of incomplete files, UNMEER was mostly successful in retrieving supporting documents (often attached to emails of hiring managers and human resources staff) to complete the specific files.

3. UNMEER agrees that for candidates who were not recruited from the roster, the hiring manager was required to evaluate the academic qualifications and work experience of candidates. In all these cases, a reasoned and documented record of such evaluation existed in the form of e-mail correspondences and formal selection memorandums justifying the reasons for the selection of a particular candidate.

4. When a candidate is recruited from the roster of pre-cleared candidates, the hiring manager is not required to evaluate the academic qualifications and work experience of

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the candidate. However, in both instances, the Mission still required that a selection memorandum be submitted regardless of whether a candidate is recruited from the roster or not.

5. In the case of UNMEER, section 7 of ST/AI/2010/3 on the pre-screening and assessment processes on recruitment does not apply since no post specific job openings (PSJOs) were posted. Without a PSJO, there were no pre-screened applicants for the hiring manager to review and further short list. As per paragraphs 9.4 and 9.5 of STAI/2010/3 on the Staff Selection System, “*should an eligible roster candidate be suitable for the job opening, the hiring manager may recommend his/her immediate selection to the head of department/office/ mission without reference to the central review body.*”

6. Recruitment under the Special Measures waived the need for a comparative analysis report as there was no requirement for posting a temporary job opening. A comparative analysis report is usually generated from a list of candidates who apply to a job opening but since there was no job opening posted, a comparative analysis report was not generated. In its place, a selection memorandum or routing slip for recruitment detailing the reasons for the selection of a candidate had to be submitted before recruitment was initiated. In the absence of a full recruitment process, the selection memorandum was routed through the Ebola Crisis Manager to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) as an added measure for increased transparency.

Delays in Medical Clearances (paragraphs 37-39)

7. Regarding the comments made by OIOS in paragraphs 37 to 39 of the draft report, the Medical Services Division (MSD), Office of Human Resources Management, Department of Management has provided the following clarification of the time taken to complete medical clearances: “*It should be noted that the average of 6,7 days for medical clearance was largely due to the submission of incomplete medical reports, specifically lack of vaccination documentation or the vaccination itself, and does not reflect the time to process a medical clearance request after all relevant and complete documents are received.*”

8. DFS would like to place on record the significant delays, which caused serious harm to the Mission in the deployment of staff as a result of medical clearance requirements and procedures. Requirements were overly onerous; feedback to the Mission and staff members from MSD regarding problems with requests for clearance was very poor and slow; there was an incomprehensible refusal to allow staff with existing medical clearance and serving in other missions to travel to UNMEER; and there was a refusal to allow staff being recruited to even travel to Accra, where there was a level 4 hospital, to start induction pending final medical clearance. MSD created unreasonably high barriers without considering the impact on the Mission’s start-up and this had a very negative effect on UNMEER.

Management Response

Audit of the United Nations Mission for Ebola Emergency Response

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical ¹ / Important ²	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	DFS should assess the exceptional measures requested for UNMEER to determine whether they need to be enhanced to be more effective in facilitating the recruitment of staff for future emergency missions. This should include reviewing the reducing inconsistencies in benefits and entitlements among staff in the United Nations common system.	Important	Yes	Director, Field Personnel Division	Implemented	The Department of Field Support (DFS) has conducted a preliminary assessment, and while it was found that exceptional measures certainly helped, more could have been accomplished if (a) the measures had been stronger. For instance, if DFS had had the ability to grant 12- month contracts, problems indicated elsewhere in the audit report could have been avoided; (b) if the measures had been standing ones, there would have been no need for DFS to request them from the Department of Management (DM) and then have to negotiate over them. DFS notes that this is at least the fourth time special measures have been provided by the Secretary-General (Haiti earthquake, Mali deployment and Central African Republic deployment), and it would seem that none of the risks that the many layers of process/control are intended to guard against, ever materialised. This strongly suggests the superfluous processes/controls in place only serve to delay things,

¹ Critical recommendations address significant and/or pervasive deficiencies or weaknesses in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance cannot be provided regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

² Important recommendations address important deficiencies or weaknesses in governance, risk management or internal control processes, such that reasonable assurance may be at risk regarding the achievement of control and/or business objectives under review.

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						<p>rather than truly protect against risk. DFS additionally notes that the report of the High-Level Independent Panel on United Nations Peace Operations recommends institutionalising the concept of special measures, and this is being actively pursued with DM and the implementation team in the Executive Office of the Secretary-General. Finally, with regard to the issue of different entitlements, which is troublesome in general, and for UNMEER, it is one that neither DFS nor UNMEER had any control over.</p> <p>In the future, DFS will also request to include the issuance of secondments without the issuance of a temporary job opening or job opening as part of the exceptional measures. The contractual modality of secondments ensures that staff deployed from the agencies, funds and programmes to serve in the Secretariat are under the same conditions of service as Secretariat staff. Secondments are normally only applicable for vacant positions of one year or longer so this is why they would need to be included as part of the exceptional measures for start-up missions.</p>
2	DFS should establish a system to ensure that adequate documentation is retained regarding recruitment exercises and that	Important	Yes	Director, Field Personnel Division	Implemented	Rather than open expressions of interest for emergency situation positions to a broad pool of applicants

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	responses to expressions of interest for positions to be filled in emergency situations are reviewed and processed.					and occupational groups, in future, DFS will attract expressions of interest from suitable candidates by first determining with missions the specialised requirements of the positions and targeting staff/institutions with the necessary expert knowledge. In addition, DFS will work to strategically strengthen relationships with the agencies specialising in such situations so that the Department may utilise these rosters if a similar event arises in the future and DFS is required to support the mission. A targeted outreach campaign rather than a general expression of interest will also help to ensure that adequate documentation is retained of the recruitment exercise.