



## INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

### REPORT 2019/055

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Audit of the strategic communications programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

The Mission needed to update its communication strategy, improve monitoring of its work plans and evaluate the impact of its communications programme

26 June 2019  
Assignment No. AP2018/812/01

# **Audit of the strategic communications programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the strategic communications programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the planning, implementation and monitoring of the UNAMI strategic communications programme. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2019 and included work planning and risk management, work plan implementation and performance monitoring and management of the Public Information Office.

UNAMI planned and carried out the strategic communication programme in coordination with stakeholders. However, to enhance the programme, UNAMI needed to update its communication strategy, improve monitoring of its work plans and evaluate the impact of its communications programme.

OIOS made four recommendations. To address issues identified in the audit, UNAMI needed to:

- Review and update its 2016 communication strategy in line with the Mission's latest mandate;
- Enhance coordination with local media to plan and implement media outreach programmes to engage and maintain dialogue with a wide range of audiences;
- Establish mechanisms for the Public Information Office to periodically monitor implementation of its work plans against established key performance indicators and to record and track receipt and responses to media queries; and
- Evaluate the Mission's strategic communications programme periodically to determine its impact and make necessary adjustments to implement them, if needed.

UNAMI accepted the recommendations and has initiated action to implement them.

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# **Audit of the strategic communications programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq**

## **I. BACKGROUND**

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of the strategic communications programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI).
2. The Public Information Office (PIO) in UNAMI is responsible to plan, implement and manage the strategic communications programme of the Mission. The programme is aimed at strengthening understanding and promoting a positive image of the role of the Mission and the United Nations in the host country. The operations of PIO are guided by the Department of Public Information (DPI), Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Support<sup>1</sup> (DFS) policy on strategic communications and public information.
3. A Chief at the D-1 level heads PIO, assisted by 17 staff, comprising four international professional staff, nine National Professional Officers and four national staff in Baghdad and at two field offices. The Chief PIO reports directly to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG). The estimated staffing costs of PIO for the 2017 and 2018 financial years were \$1.5 million and \$1.8 million, respectively. Other costs related to outreach, printing, reproduction, subscriptions, training and acquisition of public information equipment were \$451,000 and \$229,100 respectively.
4. Comments provided by UNAMI are incorporated in italics.

## **II. AUDIT OBJECTIVE, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

5. The objective of the audit was to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of the planning, implementation and monitoring of the UNAMI strategic communications programme.
6. The audit was included in the 2018 risk-based work plan of OIOS due to criticality of the public information programme in supporting UNAMI's mandate.
7. OIOS conducted this audit from February to April 2019. The audit covered the period from 1 January 2017 to 31 March 2019. Based on an activity-level risk assessment, the audit covered higher and medium risks areas in the strategic communications programme, which included: (a) work planning and risk management; (b) work plan implementation and performance monitoring; and (c) management of PIO.
8. The audit methodology included: (a) interviews of key personnel, (b) reviews of relevant documentation, (c) analytical reviews of data, (d) sample testing of relevant documentation including media and digital products, internal reports and portfolios of evidence. PIO offices in Baghdad and Erbil were visited.
9. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

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<sup>1</sup> Although these departments have been rebranded as part of ongoing reforms, the guidelines are referred to by the names of the departments when the guidelines were issued.

### III. AUDIT RESULTS

#### A. Work planning and risk management

##### UNAMI needed to update its communication strategy

10. As required by the DPI/DPKO/DFS policy on strategic communications and public information, UNAMI developed a communication strategy in December 2016 based on the Mission's 2016 mandate. The strategy included objectives, priority areas, target audiences and key activities to achieve these priorities. However, the strategy was not comprehensive as it did not include the communications platforms that would be used to reach a wider audience, and the mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategy. Despite the requirement to revise the strategy document annually, and after renewals of the Mission's mandates in 2017 and 2018, the strategy had not been reviewed to reflect recent changes. For instance, communication activities related to post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation mandated in 2017 and 2018 were not covered by the existing strategy.

11. Also, the 2016 communication strategy workshop report of PIO had highlighted the need to obtain further input from stakeholders on issues such as audience segmentation, development of core messages, tactical plans for identified priorities and pre-approved holding statements for crisis communication. However, such stakeholder inputs had not been requested and incorporated into the strategy.

12. This occurred because of shifting priorities and the delicate political and security situation in 2017 and 2018, which limited PIO's engagement with the public to certain channels of communications. As a result, the Mission's strategic communications and information activities were not guided by updated and comprehensive communication strategies to support the effective implementation of the mandate.

**(1) UNAMI should review and update its 2016 communication strategy in line with the Mission's latest mandate and include essential elements to make the strategy more comprehensive.**

*UNAMI accepted recommendation 1 and stated that it would review and update its communication strategy in line with its latest mandate. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of a copy of the updated communication strategy.*

##### PIO strengthened its annual work planning process

13. In accordance with the policy on strategic communications and public information, PIO established annual work plans for 2017 and 2018, which included background, strategic imperatives and priority areas. However, some of the planned activities did not have expected outputs, timelines for completion, assignment of roles and responsibilities and indicators of achievement to allow for an effective assessment of performance. For instance, planned activities such as development of annual PIO calendars, establishing partnerships with stakeholders and developing stakeholder satisfaction measurement mechanisms did not include specific timelines for completion. This was attributed to inadequate capacity and guidance at the Mission in developing annual work plans. In the absence of well-documented work plans clearly indicating specific activities with measurable time-bound outputs and targets, the implementation of mandated activities cannot be effectively monitored and evaluated. OIOS noted that in February 2019, the Mission conducted a training session on development of work plans and disseminated a work planning template to its sections/units for implementation. The new template provided for the inclusion of expected timelines, annual targets, activities, outputs, performance indicators and responsibilities. In addition, PIO developed a detailed calendar of events to be supported during the remaining period of 2019. Considering the actions taken by the Mission, OIOS did not make a recommendation on this issue.

## **B. Work plan implementation and performance monitoring**

### PIO coordinated with Mission components and the United Nations Communications Group

14. PIO participated in weekly senior management meetings, apprised participants on key developments and media reports on Iraq, provided multi-media coverage of the activities of the senior leadership in Iraq, coordinated with the substantive sections such as Human Rights, Political Affairs and Gender to publicize their outreach events and activities and assisted in dissemination of over 101 press statements on various activities of the Mission. Additionally, PIO conducted induction training for over 244 new staff and disseminated media guidelines to existing Mission staff to equip them with basic guidance on how to deal with media.

15. To ensure information sharing and adherence to a ‘One United Nations’ approach in strategic communications, PIO chaired the local United Nations Communications Group (UNCG), which comprised representatives of strategic communications and public information functions from 13 agencies, funds and programmes. The UNCG met fortnightly and deliberated on issues such as key events, capacity development, experience sharing and joint social media campaigns. In addition, PIO collaborated on joint multimedia projects. Also, PIO provided support and coverage of 439 major events of the United Nations country team (UNCT) on its website during the audit period. PIO also coordinated with UNCG and published a yearbook and a bi-monthly bulletin on Iraq focusing on UNCT’s contribution to peace, reconciliation, humanitarian and development activities. The audit concluded that PIO effectively coordinated with other Mission components and UNCG to support implementation of mandates.

### PIO monitored key media developments

16. As required by the DPI/DPKO/DFS policy on strategic communications and public information, PIO monitored local and international articles, news and opinion editorials from both traditional and digital media outlets and government offices and shared information twice daily with all UNAMI staff, relevant contacts in New York and the UNCT. In addition, breaking news and social media updates were shared with the Mission management daily. Monitoring reports covered a range of topics including internal politics of the host country, international and regional relations, human rights, security developments, and humanitarian and economic issues.

17. UNAMI also issued press statements on major incidents such as attacks on civilians, major political developments, publication of Mission reports and celebration of Iraqi or United Nations’ events. PIO issued 144 press statements related to major incidents in three major languages, which were posted on its website and circulated on its social media platforms. A review of 30 major events reported in mass media indicated that the press releases of events were made within 48 hours of their occurrence. OIOS concluded that UNAMI had implemented adequate media monitoring and reporting mechanisms and promptly reacted to major incidents, through press releases.

### UNAMI took action to develop a social media strategy

18. To leverage digital communications and emerging technologies including social media to maximize reach and engagement, PIO used Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Flickr as social media platforms for Mission communications. As of 31 March 2019, the English/Arabic and Kurdish Facebook accounts had 99,264 followers, which had increased by 44 per cent from 31 March 2018. UNAMI’s Twitter followers grew by 37 per cent from 45,335 to 62,179 in the same period. In the audit period, UNAMI shared 198 videos covering the Mission’s activities in YouTube, which had 41,114 views. UNAMI Flickr accounts had uploaded over 14,225 photos relating to the Mission and UNCT activities as well as different national and regional events in Iraq. Although the 2016 PIO strategy workshop had highlighted weaknesses in the Mission’s Kurdish Facebook account and identified the need to develop a social media strategy to enhance reach and engagement of stakeholders, especially the youth, PIO had not yet addressed these issues. Furthermore, the Mission was not present on other popular social media platforms such as Instagram. PIO stated that it had focused on increasing

engagement of its real followers on Facebook and Twitter, before embarking on embracing another platform which would require additional resources. To rectify shortcoming on its Kurdish Facebook page, PIO planned to enroll its Kurdish-speaking staff in a professional social media training course by the end of 2019.

19. Nevertheless, despite the number of Facebook followers, some social media posts and stories attracted very few comments, likes or shares, indicating the need to examine and enhance current practices of engaging audiences. After the audit field visit, in May 2019 UNAMI developed a draft strategy on social media, which included objectives, target audiences, platforms to use and roles and responsibilities. OIOS did not make a recommendation on this issue as UNAMI took action to address it.

#### Need to enhance coordination with local media to plan and implement media outreach programmes

20. The PIO work plans included activities aimed at enhancing outreach programmes and partnership with local media; however, no television or radio broadcasts on the Mission's priority areas were produced. Although the Mission attributed this to security limitations, it could have been mitigated through appropriate measures, including implementation of reverse outreach programmes where interlocutors and local media are invited to the Mission's premises. Furthermore, PIO media outreach activities indicated in the result-based budget documents of other substantive sections, were not adequately implemented. For instance, in 2017, five media outreach activities related to the World Diversity Day and International Day of Peace were not delivered. Although PIO participated in a series of roundtables in 2018 and posted in its website more than five press releases, captions and photos for two planned outputs for the Political Affairs Section, the five related media outreach activities were not implemented due to shifting Mission priorities.

21. Also, PIO had not established partnerships with local media, and it did not have any arrangements for local media to broadcast programmes on behalf of UNAMI, though it had an unutilized budget of \$100,000 for outreach programmes during 2017 and 2018. PIO advised that it did not enter into partnerships with local media to maintain its neutrality and objectivity because most of the television and radio stations were affiliated with political parties. However, it was noted that there were independent media channels in Iraq. As a result, PIO missed an opportunity to reach the local community through traditional media outreach activities, to engage them to advance discussions around the Mission's mandated issues and build support at grassroots level.

**(2) UNAMI should enhance coordination with local media to plan and implement media outreach programmes to engage and maintain dialogue with a wide range of audiences.**

*UNAMI accepted recommendation 2 and stated that it would strengthen coordination with local media to plan and implement media outreach programmes and maintain dialogue with a wide range of audiences. Recommendation 2 remains open pending receipt of evidence of coordination with local media and implementation of planned media outreach programmes.*

#### PIO established controls over clearance and archiving of public information outputs

22. As required by the DPI/DPKO/DFS policy, public information outputs, such as press releases and statements were approved by the Chief PIO and the SRSR before release to the public. PIO also maintained archives of photos, videos and print products on its website and external drives. PIO assigned a webmaster to maintain its website, which was backed up on a weekly basis, and digital copies of PIO print media were also maintained in back up files, along with the manual copies. OIOS concluded that PIO had established adequate controls over clearance and archiving of public information outputs.

Need to monitor the implementation of work plans and evaluate the impact of the strategic communications programme

23. The United Nations regulations and rules governing programme planning (ST/SGB/2018/3) and the DPI/DPKO/DFS policy on strategic communications and public information require missions to monitor the implementation of their work plans and to conduct internal and external evaluations of programmes to systematically and objectively assess their relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and impact. The United Nations management reforms also emphasize this. However, PIO did not effectively monitor the implementation of its work plans, which also did not include key performance indicators. While 25 out of 42 planned activities were fully or partially implemented, 17 other activities including strengthening radio partnerships, development of PIO activity calendar and enhancing social media strategy were not conducted. PIO also did not document the reasons for non-implementation. In 2017 and 2018, annual retreats or alternative follow-up mechanisms were not conducted, resulting in a missed opportunity to assess the implementation status of previous work plans, discuss lessons learned and appropriately adjust subsequent work plans.

24. In addition, UNAMI received queries from the media but PIO did not maintain documentary evidence, such as logs of media queries to demonstrate how these queries were tracked and resolved. As a result, there was no assurance that media queries were responded to in a timely manner. Subsequent to the fieldwork, PIO shared with OIOS some recent email exchanges on media queries involving key PIO staff, media houses and other stakeholders. However, systematic and comprehensive documentation and tracking of responses for all media queries received from different sources was yet to be implemented. Furthermore, due to other competing priorities PIO had never conducted an internal or external evaluation to determine the qualitative and quantitative impact of its programmes and products during the audit period. This resulted in a missed opportunity to establish the extent to which the programme objectives were achieved and to make any necessary adjustments to ensure effective support for the implementation of the Mission's mandate.

- (3) UNAMI should establish mechanisms for the Public Information Office to: i) periodically monitor implementation of its work plans against established key performance indicators; and ii) record and track receipt and responses to media queries to ensure that they are effectively and efficiently handled.**

*UNAMI accepted recommendation 3 and stated that PIO would establish a mechanism to periodically monitor implementation of its work plans against established key performance indicators and to record and track receipt of media queries using the existing Outlook email system to ensure responses to media queries are fully documented and efficiently handled. Recommendation 3 remains open pending receipt of evidence of implementation of these mechanisms.*

- (4) UNAMI should implement procedures to evaluate the strategic communications programme periodically, to determine the extent to which programme objectives are achieved and their impact and to make necessary adjustments in the implementation of the programme, if needed.**

*UNAMI accepted recommendation 4 and stated that it would implement procedures to evaluate the strategic communications programme periodically to determine its impact. Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of the first report on the evaluation of the strategic communications programme.*



## C. Management of the Public Information Office

### UNAMI was taking action to further improve gender parity in PIO

25. In line with Security Council resolutions and other policies to expand the role and contribution of women in the United Nations field-based operations, the Mission developed a gender parity implementation plan in 2018, with annual targets for each grade from 2018 to 2028 and assigned focal persons from different Units to coordinate its execution. PIO's overall gender parity was initially at par with the UNAMI achievement of 20 per cent but as of February 2019, only 2 (18 per cent) of 12 local staff were females, which was below the target. This occurred due to deteriorating safety and security conditions and cultural barriers in Iraq, limiting the employment of women. PIO indicated that it had two vacant positions for which recruitment was underway and that competent female candidates would be given prime consideration. Therefore, OIOS did not make any recommendation in this regard, as the Mission was already aware of its responsibility to further improve gender parity.

### A significant number of PIO staff had completed mandatory training

26. In accordance with the DPI/DPKO/DFS policy on strategic communications and public information, PIO staff participated in annual strategic communications seminars for public information officers organized by DPI and DPKO. PIO also planned to send five staff for external technical training in 2019. As of 15 May 2019, PIO staff had completed between 82 per cent and 100 per cent of mandatory training courses required by the Secretary-General's bulletin on the mandatory learning programme (ST/SGB/2018/4). OIOS acknowledges this achievement relating to mandatory trainings.

## IV. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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

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

## STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

## Audit of strategic communications programme in United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>2</sup> / Important <sup>3</sup>	C/ O <sup>4</sup>	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date <sup>5</sup>
1	UNAMI should review and update its 2016 communication strategy in line with the Mission's latest mandate and include essential elements to make the strategy more comprehensive.	Important	O	Submission of a copy of the updated communication strategy.	30 September 2019
2	UNAMI should enhance coordination with local media to plan and implement media outreach programmes to engage and maintain dialogue with a wide range of audience.	Important	O	Submission of evidence that outreach programmes have been planned and implemented in coordination with local media	30 September 2019
3	UNAMI should establish mechanisms for the Public Information Office to: i) periodically monitor implementation of its work plans against established key performance indicators; and ii) record and track receipt and responses to media queries to ensure that they are effectively and efficiently handled.	Important	O	Submission of evidence that mechanisms have been established to periodically monitor implementation of work plans against established key performance indicators as well as to record and track receipt and responses to media queries.	30 September 2019
4	UNAMI should implement procedures to evaluate the strategic communications programme periodically, to determine the extent to which programme objectives are achieved and their impact and to make necessary adjustments in the implementation of the programme, if needed.	Important	O	Submission of the first report on the evaluation of the strategic communications programme.	30 September 2019

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> C = closed, O = open

<sup>5</sup> Date provided by UNAMI in response to recommendations.

# **APPENDIX I**

## **Management Response**



**United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)**

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Ref.: CMS-019/008

To: Ms. Muriette Lawrence-Hume  
Chief, New York Audit Service  
Internal Audit Division, OIOS

From: Harish Joshi  
Chief Mission Support  
UNAMI

**Subject: Management Response to the draft report on an audit of the strategic communications programme in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (Assignment No. AP2018/812/01)**

With reference to your letter dated 8 June 2019 on the draft report on an audit of the strategic communication in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (Assignment No. AP2018/812 /01), kindly find UNAMI comments and action plan in the attached Appendix I Management Response for your consideration.

Best regards,

cc: Mr. Mark Rutgers, Chief of Staff, UNAMI  
Mr. Samir F. Ghattas, Chief Public Information Office, UNAMI  
Mr. Saeed Ahmed, Senior Administrative Officer, UNAMI  
Mr. Ferdinand Schafner, Audit Focal Point, UNAMI  
Ms. Cynthia Avena-Castillo, Professional Practices Section, Internal Audit Division, OIOS  
Mr. Zulfiqar Gill, Chief, Resident Audit Office in Kuwait, Internal Audit Division, OIOS

## Management Response

## Audit of the strategic communications programme in United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
1	UNAMI should review and update its 2016 communication strategy in line with the Mission's latest mandate and include essential elements to make the strategy more comprehensive.	Important	Yes	Chief PIO	End of September 2019	UNAMI will review and update its 2016 communications strategy in line with Mission's latest mandate to include essential elements (post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, key part of PIO work in late 2017 and 2018) in order to make the strategy more comprehensive.
2	UNAMI should enhance coordination with local media to plan and implement media outreach programmes to engage and maintain dialogue with a wide range of audience.	Important	Yes	Chief PIO	End of September 2019	UNAMI will strengthen coordination with local media (example given the Iraqi Media Network - IMN), to plan and implement media outreach programs (distribution of UN Iraq video/audio clips) to engage and maintain dialogue with a wide range of audience.
3	UNAMI should establish mechanisms for the Public Information Office to: i) periodically monitor implementation of its work plans against established key performance indicators; and ii) record and track receipt and responses to media queries to ensure that they are effectively and efficiently handled.	Important	Yes	Chief PIO	End of September 2019	UNAMI PIO will establish mechanism for the Public Information Office to i) periodically monitor implementation of its work plans against established key performance indicators and ii) will develop record and track receipt (through incorporation of queries via emails/mobile/whatsapp/viber/messenger/facebook) using the existing Outlook email system to ensure responses to media queries are fully documented, effectively and efficiently handled.
4	UNAMI should implement procedures to evaluate the strategic communications	Important	Yes	Chief PIO	End of September 2019	UNAMI will implement procedures to evaluate the strategic communication programme periodically (through monkey survey), to determine the extent

<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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 the strategic communications programme in United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

Rec. no.	Recommendation	Critical <sup>1</sup> / Important <sup>2</sup>	Accepted? (Yes/No)	Title of responsible individual	Implementation date	Client comments
	programme periodically, to determine the extent to which programme objectives are achieved and their impact and to make necessary adjustments in the implementation of the programme, if needed.					to which programme objectives are achieved and their impact.