



THIRTEENTH ITEM ON THE AGENDA

**Matters relating to the Joint
Inspection Unit**

**(d) Review of the ILO's collaboration with the
United Nations Joint Inspection Unit:
Comments by the Joint Inspection Unit
on document GB.288/PFA/13/1**

The Office has received a communication containing the comments of the Joint Inspection Unit on document GB.288/PFA/13/1. The text of these comments is appended.

Geneva, 5 November 2003.

Appendix

1. This paper has been prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) in response to ILO document GB.288/PFA/13/1 entitled “Review of the ILO’s collaboration with the Joint Inspection Unit”, and should be considered in connection with it. The Unit would like to express its appreciation for the opportunity to present the following observations.
2. It should first be noted that the JIU is a subsidiary organ of the ILO Governing Body. As such, it is an integral part of the Organization, rather than an exogenous entity with which the ILO “collaborates”. Accordingly, the impact of the Unit’s reports on the cost-effectiveness of the Organization’s activities is a shared responsibility of the legislative organs, the Unit and the Office. This principle of shared responsibility has been emphasized by the General Assembly of the United Nations in its resolution 50/233.
3. Unfortunately, over the years, few efforts have been undertaken by the Office to make full and active use of the Unit and its services. In particular, while the executive heads of participating organizations are invited every year to suggest items for inclusion in the JIU programme of work, the Unit’s records show no such expression of interest on the part of the Office. Nor have any specific requests been received from the ILO Governing Body.
4. Similarly, in accordance with the Unit’s standards and guidelines, the first draft of any report is always circulated for comments by the organizations and others concerned to receive factual corrections and clarifications and to ascertain the accuracy of the data included. The Unit includes in its reports factual corrections and clarifications. Many of the substantive comments, if received in time, are also taken into account in the final version of the reports. Thus, the reports are normally the product of lengthy consultations between the Unit and secretariats concerned.
5. The Unit sees this process of consultation as essential in ensuring that secretariats take ownership of the recommendations and in facilitating their implementation. In any case, when agreement cannot be reached on certain findings and recommendations, the views of the executive head concerned are reflected in the comments submitted to the competent legislative organ. The Office, therefore, has had ample opportunities to state its reservations and dissenting views on the Unit’s findings and recommendations, during the preparation of the reports and when transmitting them to the Governing Body.
6. A number of statements and generalizations contained in document GB.288/PFA/13/1 would call for detailed comment, a possibility which is not deemed appropriate in the context of this brief. The following are merely cited as examples:

- (a) *... the recommendations of the JIU tend to pay little attention to the characteristics of the ILO, in particular its unique tripartite structure (paragraph 7).*

Comment: A review of JIU reports and ILO comments in recent years reveals that in only one instance (JIU/REP/2002/1 – Civil Society Organizations) has the Office made any specific mention of the tripartite nature of the ILO (GB.288/PFA/13/3, paragraph 12). Nonetheless, the observation was preceded by the statement “*In general, the ILO supports the conclusions and recommendations of the report ...*”

- (b) *The JIU’s recommendations tend to be insufficiently clear, relevant or concrete to be of direct use by the ILO (paragraph 8).*

Comment: This statement is noted in the light of the Office’s own analysis of recommendations included in JIU reports from 1999 to 2002 indicating that 80 of 146 recommendations were applicable to the ILO. The Unit itself, in its detailed internal review, has concluded that in certain cases the criticism appears to be well founded. It should be recognized, however, as most other organizations and members of legislative bodies have done, that tangible improvement has been made by the Unit in recent years. More important, the Unit is committed and determined to tailor its recommendations to the concrete needs of individual participating organizations.

- (c) *While actions have been often in line with broad JIU recommendations, no case has been found of a specific change in practice that has resulted from JIU recommendations. On the contrary, failure to follow JIU recommendations has often resulted from a concern for costs, as in the case of the frequent recommendations to establish coordination offices or focal points on topics the JIU has considered (paragraph 11).*

Comment: As indicated above, the drafts of JIU reports are amply shared with all secretariats, which are invited to present their comments and factual corrections. However, the JIU records do not show that comments such as those reflected in (c) above have been submitted by the Office on individual JIU draft reports submitted for its consideration. In any event, there is no record of instances in which JIU proposed that new structures be established by the ILO, with financial implications for the Office. The Unit believes that it is only fair that the opinions of the Office regarding the content and potential implications of JIU recommendations should be openly and constructively discussed with the authors of the reports during its preparation.

7. Moreover, delays in the consideration of the reports can only affect their relevance and timeliness negatively. As acknowledged by the Office, more than half of the recommendations included in reports submitted during the period 1999-2002 were applicable to the ILO. However, JIU records again show that 17 months elapsed on average between the time that JIU reports were finalized and submitted formally for their consideration and action by the ILO Governing Body.
8. Notwithstanding the above, the Unit is well aware of the need to bring improvements to its own functioning if it is to fulfil its mandate and meet the needs of the participating organizations more effectively. It has adopted a series of measures in the past few years aimed at better steering its work in the selection, planning, conduct and handling of its reports. These measures include the adoption in 1996 of a set of standards and guidelines and the design in 1999 of a follow-up system for its reports and recommendations, which has been endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and agreed to by most other participating organizations, as a means to streamline procedures for the handling and consideration of reports. As regards the ILO, the Unit stands ready to consider jointly with the Office a system that takes fully into account the concerns of the Governing Body.
9. Further changes, some of which may require amendments to the statute, are undoubtedly necessary. The Unit has outlined them in a document submitted to the current session of the United Nations General Assembly entitled "Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on the preliminary review of its statute and working methods".¹ This document has also been transmitted to executive heads of participating organizations for their views. In the process of consultations held thus far, the Administrative and Budgetary (Fifth) Committee of the Assembly has welcomed the document as a frank and clear presentation of the Unit's difficulties. Reiterating the importance of the JIU as the sole system-wide, independent external oversight body, members of the Committee have asked the Unit to submit a "final" review document before the end of the current session. The Unit is presently preparing this document, which will outline concrete proposals to tackle the weaknesses identified in the first, and will address many of the points made in document GB.288/PFA/13/1.
10. The informal consultations held with representatives of the executive heads of participating organizations, and the written comments thus far received from them on this preliminary review, reveal wide support for the need to preserve the Unit's distinctive character and build on its comparative advantages by focusing increasingly on its potential for system-wide "management consultancy" and evaluation rather than the investigation functions originally envisaged in article 5 of its statute and which are now routinely undertaken by internal and external auditors. The Unit's unique position to act as a catalyst for the comparison and dissemination of best managerial, administrative and programming practices in the system as a whole was emphasized. The high costs related to the use of private management consulting firms who are not all well attuned to the specific constraints of United Nations organizations were noted by some. In general, comments made indicate the organizations' willingness to work constructively with the Unit to maximize the effectiveness of its activities for their mutual benefit.
11. At this time, therefore, the Unit cannot concur with the recommendation made in document GB.288/PFA/13/1 that the ILO should transmit notice of withdrawal from the JIU and monitor the Unit's reform process towards the end of the two-year notice period. **Instead, the Unit recommends that the Governing Body defer the consideration of the matter until the completion of the Unit's internal review exercise and request the Director-General to pursue consultations with the Unit as well as with other executive heads of participating organizations on tangible ways to enhance the Unit's impact.**

¹ United Nations document A/58/343.