



OIOS

Office of Internal Oversight Services

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

AUDIT REPORT

Recruitment in UNAMI

A 50 per cent vacancy rate has had significant impact on UNAMI's operations.

26 November 2008

Assignment No. AP2008/812/05

United Nations  Nations Unies

INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

MEMORANDUM INTERIEUR

OFFICE OF INTERNAL OVERSIGHT SERVICES - BUREAU DES SERVICES DE CONTRÔLE INTERNE
INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION - DIVISION DE L'AUDIT INTERNE

TO: Mr. Staffan de Mistura
A: Special Representative of the Secretary-General
United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq

DATE: 26 November 2008

REFERENCE: IAD: 08- 02009

FROM: Dagfinn Knutsen, Director
DE: Internal Audit Division, OIOS



SUBJECT: **Assignment No. AP2008/812/05 – Audit of recruitment in UNAMI**

OBJET:

1. I am pleased to present the report on the above-mentioned audit.
2. Based on your comments, we are pleased to inform you that we will close recommendations 2, 3, 5 and 6 in the OIOS recommendations database as indicated in Annex 1. In order for us to close the remaining recommendations, we request that you provide us with the additional information as discussed in the text of the report and also summarized in Annex 1.
3. Your response indicated that you did not accept recommendations 1 and 4. In OIOS' opinion however, these recommendations seek to address significant risk areas. We are therefore reiterating them and requesting that you reconsider your initial response based on the additional information provided in the report.
4. Please note that OIOS will report on the progress made to implement its recommendations, particularly those designated as high risk (i.e., recommendation 4) in its annual report to the General Assembly and semi-annual report to the Secretary-General.

cc: Mr. Milan Trojanovic, Chief of Mission Support, UNAMI
Mr. Swatantra Goolsarran, Executive Secretary, UN Board of Auditors
Ms. Maria Gomez Troncoso, Officer-in-Charge, Joint Inspection Unit Secretariat
Ms. Christina Post, Chief, Oversight Support Unit, Department of Management
Mr. Seth Adza, Audit Response Team, DFS/DPKO
Mr. Byung-Kun Min, Programme Officer, OIOS

INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

FUNCTION

“The Office shall, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations examine, review and appraise the use of financial resources of the United Nations in order to guarantee the implementation of programmes and legislative mandates, ascertain compliance of programme managers with the financial and administrative regulations and rules, as well as with the approved recommendations of external oversight bodies, undertake management audits, reviews and surveys to improve the structure of the Organization and its responsiveness to the requirements of programmes and legislative mandates, and monitor the effectiveness of the systems of internal control of the Organization” (General Assembly Resolution 48/218 B).

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Audit of recruitment in UNAMI

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of recruitment in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The overall objective of the audit was to determine the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls regarding the recruitment of staff. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

The Mission recruited 444 national and international staff from January 2006 to March 2008. Due to the volatile security situation in its area of operation, UNAMI faced many recruitment challenges. Despite those challenges, UNAMI was responding to its human resources needs. However, there were opportunities for improvement, as follows:

- Guidelines and standards had not been developed locally outlining the timeframe for recruiting national staff. As a result, the Mission could not assure the efficiency and effectiveness of the process.
- Contrary to the Department of Field Support Human Resources Management Policy, vacancy announcements for the recruitment of national staff were closed in less than 14 days of the announcement being circulated.
- There were instances where recruitments were made without vacancy announcement and interview.
- Four international candidates and two national candidates were recruited although they did not have the relevant academic qualifications and work experience specified in the respective vacancy announcements.
- The required numbers of candidates were not shortlisted and interviewed for 10 of the 58 international and national recruitment cases reviewed by OIOS.
- In two instances, the selection of candidates was not supported by the required comparative evaluation worksheets of the relevant interviewing panels.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of recruitment in the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

2. UNAMI operates in Iraq, Kuwait, and Jordan. Consequently, UNAMI maintains human resources management functions in those countries under the overall management of the Human Resources Section (HRS), which is located in Kuwait. The Human Resources Unit is located in Iraq, the Recruitment and Induction Unit in Jordan, and the International Staff Unit in Kuwait. The Chief of HRS reports to the Chief of Administrative Services (CAS) who in turn reports to the Chief of Mission Support (CMS).

3. As of 31 March 2008, UNAMI had a total of 668 staff including 286 international staff and 382 national staff. From 1 January 2006 to 31 March 2008, UNAMI recruited 229 international staff and 215 national staff.

4. The Field Personnel Division (FPD) of the Department of Field Support (DFS) and UNAMI are jointly responsible for recruiting and appointing international staff and UNAMI is solely responsible for recruiting national staff.

5. Comments made by UNAMI are shown in *italics*.

II. AUDIT OBJECTIVES

6. The main objectives of the audit were to:

(a) Assess the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls regarding the recruitment of staff; and

(b) Determine compliance with the relevant policies and procedures.

III. AUDIT SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

7. The audit covered the recruitment of civilian personnel for the period from 1 January 2006 to 31 March 2008. The audit was conducted in Kuwait and Jordan. A sample of 74 recruitment cases were selected, which included 29 international recruitments and 30 national recruitments, as well as the recruitment of 15 individual contractors. The auditors were precluded from reviewing 23 of the 52 international recruitment cases since UNAMI, at the time of the audit, did not maintain these records. The auditors were also precluded from accessing the Field Personnel Management Systems to validate certain recruitment information in the system. The Mission did not provide the auditors with access to the System stating that it had not received the approval of the DFS.

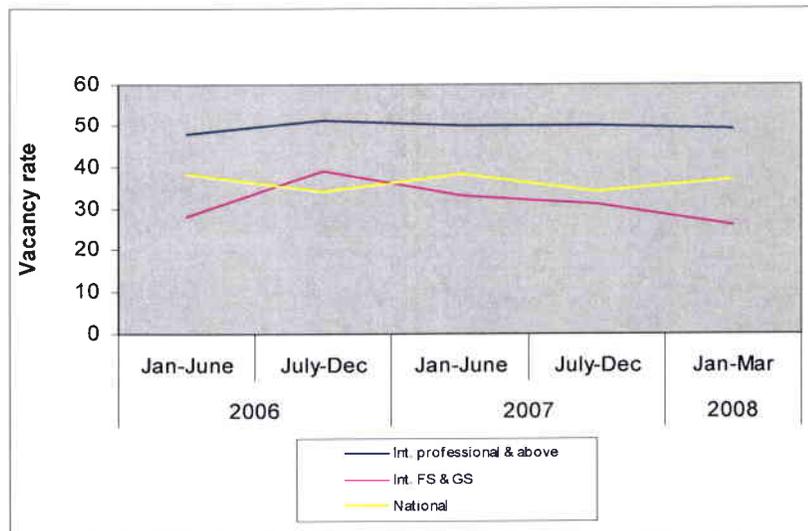
8. The audit methodology comprised interviews with key Mission personnel, analysis of data and review of relevant records and documents.

IV. AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Vacancy rate

9. Of the 1,038 posts authorized in the 2008 approved budget, 668 were encumbered as of 31 March 2008. As indicated in Figure 1 below, the overall vacancy rate of the Mission as of March 2008 was approximately 36 per cent, which is high compared to the vacancy rates in stable missions, which according to UNAMI range between 20 to 25 per cent. The average vacancy rate for field service, general service and national staff ranged from 25 to 35 per cent respectively. However, as indicated in Figure 1 below, the actual vacancy rate for professional posts as at March 2008 was much higher than the 42 per cent vacancy rate used in preparing the budget. Programme managers informed OIOS that they could not provide the level of services expected of their sections and that their staff had been stretched due to the high vacancy rates.

Figure 1: Trend of vacancy rate (2006-2008)



10. The volatile security situation in Iraq has impeded the timely recruitment of staff. Moreover, high vacancy rates resulted, in part, from delays in recruitment. A review of 29 national recruitment cases revealed that it took from 90 to 270 days (from the date of the vacancy announcement to the date an offer of appointment is made) to complete more than 55 per cent of the reviewed recruitment cases. It took up to a year to complete 5 of the 29 international recruitment cases reviewed by OIOS.

11. Delays in recruitment resulted from the absence of adequate standards and monitoring procedures to ensure the timeliness of recruitment. On 10 January

2008, UNAMI issued Administrative Circular 02/2008 highlighting the guiding principles of international staff selection and stipulating the timelines for staff selection processes at the Mission's level as 5-6 weeks. OIOS notes that the Circular does not address the expected time frame for the recruitment of national staff.

Recommendation 1

(1) The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should develop appropriate recruitment standards and timelines and subsequently monitor compliance with those standards through formalized reporting in order to reduce the high vacancy rate.

12. *The UNAMI Office of Mission Support did not accept recommendation 1 and stated that the SOPs promulgated by DFS for international recruitment are applicable to all missions. To ensure clarity, UNAMI issues guidance to programme managers and monitors compliance through the newly rolled out Human Resource Action Plan. The same process applies to the recruitment of national staff.* The Mission was unable to provide OIOS with the requested supporting evidence showing how it monitors compliance with the established standards. OIOS reiterates recommendation 1 and requests UNAMI to reconsider its initial response to the recommendation. Recommendation 1 remains open pending receipt of a copy of the standards used to monitor the recruitment process.

B. Vacancy announcement

Circulation of vacancy announcements

13. Four of the 29 vacancy announcements for national posts reviewed were closed in less than 14 days of the announcements being circulated. This is contrary to DPKO Human Resources Management Policy, which requires that each vacancy announcement should be circulated for at least 14 days. There were no records documenting the reasons for the Mission's circulation of these vacancy announcements for less than the required period. By allowing insufficient time for circulation of vacancy announcements, UNAMI's ability to recruit qualified staff may be impeded.

Recommendation 2

(2) The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that the minimum period of 14 days is allowed for all vacancy announcements by requiring the Human Resources Section to prepare periodic reports on the circulation of vacancy announcements in order to attract more applicants to fill vacancies.

14. *The UNAMI Office of Mission Support accepted recommendation 2 and stated that it has since January 2008 started to comply with the 14 days minimum*

period of vacancy announcement for local recruitments. Recommendation 2 remains open pending verification by OIOS that vacancy announcements are circulated for at least 14 days.

Recruitment without vacancy announcement

15. Two posts (i.e. a post for Electoral Affairs Officer (EAO) - international and another post for Humanitarian Officer - national) were filled without vacancy announcements being issued. Communications between DFS and the UNAMI regarding the EAO post indicate the absence of any clear guidance on whether such a post should have been advertised in Galaxy or filled from the roster of successful applicants of the Electoral Assistance Division (EAD).

16. Under normal recruitment practices, a vacancy announcement has to be made before filling a vacant post. Non-compliance with such a procedure compromises the transparency and competitiveness of the process and creates lack of trust in the recruitment system.

Recommendation 3

(3) The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that the recruitment of staff is made only through appropriate vacancy announcements to make the process transparent and competitive.

17. *The UNAMI Office of Mission Support accepted recommendation 3 and stated that the Mission strictly adheres to the standards and procedures established in the SOPs. However, there was an exigency of the requirement in the case of national Humanitarian Officer that was the overriding factor. In the case of international selection of Electoral Affairs Officer, UNAMI finalized the process of recruitment after consultation between Electoral Assistance Division and Field Personnel Division (FPD) of DFS. Based on the explanation provided and assurances provided that the Mission normally strictly adheres to the required procedures, recommendation 3 has been closed.*

C. Initial and technical clearance

Proper technical screening

18. The academic qualifications and work experience of six recruited candidates reviewed did not match the requirements specified in the relevant vacancy announcement as follows:

- Air Operations Assistant (FS-4);
- IT Assistant (FS-4);
- Translator/Interpreter (P-3);
- Human Resources Officer (FS-6); and
- Two GL-5 posts for national staff.

19. UNAMI was unable to demonstrate that the candidates had the relevant academic qualifications and work experience. Technical clearing of candidates is an essential aspect of the recruitment process. It helps to ensure that candidates are properly screened and those selected meet the stated requirements of the relevant posts. The lack of a proper screening process could affect UNAMI's ability to recruit qualified staff.

Recommendation 4

(4) The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that all candidates are technically cleared before they are recruited by requiring the Human Resources Section to periodically report on the technical clearances issued.

20. *The UNAMI Office of Mission Support did not accept recommendation 4 and stated that once the initial clearance is given by DFS/FPD, the Mission strictly adheres to the SOP regarding technical clearance of international candidates. There is no system of technical clearance of local candidates; but the Personal History Profiles (PHPs) are reviewed against the requirements of the vacancy announcement.* As indicated in paragraph 19 above, the Mission did not adhere to the requirement for technical clearance of international candidates. OIOS reiterates recommendation 4 and request UNAMI to reconsider its initial response to the recommendation. Recommendation 4 remains open pending records showing that the four recruited international candidates referred to in paragraph 18 above were technically cleared in accordance with existing procedures and verification that the staff meet the requirements of the relevant posts.

D. Competency based interview and documentation of selection

Short listing for interviews

21. Once the list of eligible candidates has been narrowed down to a shortlist that matches the post-specific evaluation criteria and the Organization's requirements, the candidates should be interviewed to assess their competencies and core values as specified in the relevant vacancy announcements. A minimum of three candidates are to be shortlisted for each vacancy.

22. UNAMI did not shortlist the required number of candidates for 10 of the 58 international and national recruitments reviewed by OIOS. The practice of not consistently shortlisting the required number or even more candidates is ineffective, considering the very high possibility that some may decline an invitation due to the volatile security situation in the Mission area.

23. UNAMI explained that the number of qualified applicants was often small. Therefore, it was not always possible to shortlist three candidates per vacancy.

Recommendation 5

(5) The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should endeavour to shortlist more candidates so that at least three candidates could be interviewed for each vacant position and whenever enough candidates are not available; this has to be duly documented.

24. *The UNAMI Office of Mission Support accepted recommendation 5 and stated that exceptional approval by FPD is sought where the Mission experiences difficulties in meeting the ratio of three shortlisted candidates per vacancy in the case of international recruitment. Based on the explanation provided by the Mission, recommendation 5 has been closed.*

Competency based interview training

25. Information Circular 128/2007 issued by UNAMI on 19 September 2007 states that only staff members who have been trained in competency-based interviewing skills may participate in interview panels. Of the 55 staff members that participated in interview panels after the issuance of the above-mentioned circulars, 20 had not taken the competency-based interviewing training organized by UNAMI.

26. Since the competency-based interview training became compulsory only after September 2007, it was still too early, at the time of the audit, for all programme managers to avail themselves of the opportunity to attend the training. In addition, some programme managers stated that they had taken competency-based training at their previous duty station. However, HRS had not obtained records of the staff members' participation in the training. In OIOS' opinion, it is important for all staff involved in interviewing to undergo the relevant training to ensure the recruitment process is not compromised.

Recommendation 6

(6) The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that competency based interviewing skills training be given for staff members who participate in an interview panel.

27. *The UNAMI Office of Mission Support accepted recommendation 6 and stated that with the recent on-boarding of new training staff, the Mission is organizing many competency-based interviewing training and is encouraging all programme managers and staff to attend the training. The Mission further clarified that its SOP requires at least one panel member to have the training. Based on the response of the Mission, recommendation 6 has been closed.*

Selection of candidates

28. Two instances were noted in which the selection of the candidates was not supported by the required comparative evaluation of the relevant interviewing panels. For post number 56642 (P-3), there was no record that the selected staff

had been evaluated by the panel. Moreover, the selected candidate had been previously interviewed and evaluated for another vacancy, at P-3 level, by another panel and found not to be suitable.

29. In another instance, the candidate was not recommended for the post of Humanitarian Affairs Officer, but was recommended for a position as Reporting Officer. Despite this, the candidate was recruited as a Humanitarian Affairs Officer. There was no record showing that the candidate had been properly vetted and assessed as qualified for the post of Humanitarian Affairs Officer.

Recommendation 7

(7) The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that the recommendation for any recruitment is made with due care and proper evaluation based on comparative evaluation worksheet and if there is any deviation from the panel's recommendation that should clearly be documented.

30. *The UNAMI Office of Mission Support accepted recommendation 7 and stated that only initially and technically cleared candidates who have undergone competitive selection are recommended for recruitment.* Recommendation 7 remains open pending verification by OIOS that the necessary evaluations were performed with respect to the three recruitments referred to in paragraphs 28 and

E. Reference checks

31. DFS is responsible for performing reference checks of international candidates and UNAMI is responsible for performing reference checks for national candidates. Reference checks are performed to verify the candidate's academic qualifications and work experience.

32. UNAMI did not always perform reference checks as required. Of the 29 national recruitment cases reviewed by OIOS, reference checks had only been performed for 2 of them. UNAMI was unable to provide any evidence of its attempts to verify the qualifications of the other 27 national recruits. The failure of the Mission to perform the required reference checks could result in recruitment of non-qualified candidates, and or unsuitable candidates.

33. UNAMI explained that it was experiencing difficulties in verifying the qualifications of Iraqi candidates stating that, in a post conflict country, conducting a reference check is almost impossible. OIOS observed, however, that UNAMI also did not always perform reference checks of non-Iraqi candidates for posts in Jordan and Kuwait.

Recommendation 8

(8) The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure reference checks are conducted in the recruitment of national staff and appropriate documentation is maintained where reference checks are not feasible and practicable.

34. *The UNAMI Office of Mission Support accepted recommendation 8 stating that reference checks are conducted regularly and documentation maintained in files.* OIOS found evidence that the Mission is not performing reference checks. Recommendation 8 remains open pending verification by OIOS that there is a mechanism established to ensure reference checks are undertaken for all newly recruited staff.

F. Other matters

Gender and geographic balance

35. The DFS/DPKO HR Handbook states that the selection of staff must be made with due regard to the principles of equitable geographical distribution and gender equality. While Mission posts are not subject to geographic distribution *per se*, every effort should be made to ensure an equitable geographic balance and to increase the numbers of staff from under-represented Member States.

36. Of the 229 international staff recruited by the Mission from January 2006 to March 2008, female and male staff members constituted 22 and 78 per cent respectively. Out of the total recruitment made during this period, 59 per cent were recruited only from 10 countries. There was no mechanism in place for monitoring geographic distribution and gender equality. As a result, some programme managers were not aware of the overall picture of gender and geographic balance in the Mission and were therefore precluded from taking appropriate measures at the time of recruitment.

Recommendation 9

(9) The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should provide gender and geographic distribution information periodically to programme managers to help improve gender and geographic balance.

37. *The UNAMI Office of Mission Support accepted recommendation 9 and stated that this will be implemented to the extent possible.* Recommendation 9 remains open pending confirmation that HRS provides gender and geographic distribution information periodically to programme managers.

V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

38. We wish to express our appreciation to the Management and staff of UNAMI for the assistance and cooperation extended to the auditors during this assignment.

STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Risk category	Risk rating	C/O ¹	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ²
1	The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should develop appropriate recruitment standards and timeliness and subsequently monitor compliance with those standards through formalized reporting.	Governance	Medium	O	Receipt of a copy of the standards used to monitor the recruitment process.	Not provided
2	The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that the minimum period of 14 days is allowed for all vacancy announcements by requiring the Human Resources Section to prepare periodic reports on the circulation of vacancy announcements.	Compliance	Medium	C	Verification by OIOS that vacancy announcements are circulated for at least 14 days	Continuous
3	The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that the recruitment of staff is made only through appropriate vacancy announcements to make the process transparent and competitive.	Compliance	Medium	C	Implemented	Implemented
4	The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that all candidates are technically cleared before they are recruited by requiring the Human Resources Section to periodically report to on technical clearance issued.	Operational	High	O	Records showing that the 6 recruited candidates referred to in paragraph 18 above were technically cleared in accordance with existing procedures.	Not provided
5	The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should endeavour to shortlist more candidates so that at least three candidates could be interviewed for each vacant position and whenever enough candidates are not available; this has to be duly documented.	Operational	Medium	C	Implemented	Continuous
6	The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that competency based interviewing skills training be given for	Human resources	Medium	C	Implemented	Implemented

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Risk category	Risk rating	C/ O ¹	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date ²
7	staff members who participate in an interview panel. The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure that the recommendation for any recruitment are made with due care and proper evaluation based on comparative evaluation worksheet and if there is any deviation from the panel's recommendation that should clearly be documented.	Operational	High	O	Verification by OIOS that the necessary evaluations were performed with respect to the three recruitments referred to in paragraphs 28 and 29.	Done already
8	The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should ensure reference checks are conducted in the recruitment of national staff and appropriate documentation should be maintained where reference checks are not feasible and practicable.	Compliance	Medium	O	Verification by OIOS that there is a mechanism to undertake reference checks of locally recruited staff.	Continuous
9	The UNAMI Office of Mission Support should provide gender and geographic distribution information periodically to programme managers to help improve gender and geographic balance.	Human resources	Medium	O	Confirmation that HRS provides programme managers with information on gender and geographical distribution.	Immediate

¹ C = closed, O = open

² Date provided by UNAMI in response to recommendations