



**OIOS**

Office of Internal Oversight Services

## **INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION**

# **AUDIT REPORT**

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## **Audit of Records Management in UNMIL**

**UNMIL has not established a Mission-wide  
records management programme**

**30 October 2009**

**Assignment No. AP2009/626/11**

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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: Ms. Ellen Margrethe Løj  
A: Special Representative of the Secretary-General  
United Nations Mission in Liberia

DATE: 30 October 2009

REFERENCE: IAD: 09-03071

FROM: Fatoumata Ndiaye, Acting Director  
DE: Internal Audit Division, OIOS

*Fatoumata*

SUBJECT: **Assignment No. AP2009/626/11 – Audit of Records Management in UNMIL**  
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 6 and 7 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. Please note that OIOS will report on the progress made to implement its recommendations, particularly those designated as high risk (i.e., recommendations 1 and 5) in its annual report to the General Assembly and semi-annual report to the Secretary-General.

cc: Mr. Stephen Lieberman, Director of Mission Support, UNMIL  
Ms. Stephani Scheer, Chief of Administrative Services, UNMIL  
Ms. Zuzanna Lukaszczyk, Chief of Information Management Unit, UNMIL  
Mr. Swatantra Goolsarran, Executive Secretary, UN Board of Auditors  
Ms. Susanne Frueh, Executive Secretary, Joint Inspection Unit Secretariat  
Mr. Moses Bamuwanye, Chief, Oversight Support Unit, Department of Management  
Mr. Seth Adza, Chief, Audit Response Team, Department of Field Support  
Mr. Byung-Kun Min, Programme Officer, OIOS  
Ms. Eleanor T. Burns, Chief, Peacekeeping Audit Service, OIOS

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## INTERNAL AUDIT DIVISION

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### **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**

### **Records management in UNMIL**

OIOS conducted an audit of records management in the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The overall objective of the audit was to determine compliance with established records management and archiving rules, guidelines and procedures. The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.

OIOS found that the Information Management Unit, which had been restructured in February 2009, had the correct focus but lacked a formal records management programme to ensure good practices for recordkeeping throughout the Mission. OIOS identified the following opportunities for improvement:

- The recordkeeping system did not facilitate easy retrieval of documents and ensure accountability for their movement and safekeeping;
- There was a lack of compliance with ST/SGB/2007/5 on records management; retention schedules were not established and business continuity plans did not identify vital records that needed to be preserved; and
- There were inadequate controls over the handling of sensitive information and documents.

OIOS made a number of recommendations to address the weaknesses identified during the audit and to contribute to improving records management in UNMIL.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) conducted an audit of records management in the United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL). The audit was conducted in accordance with the International Standards for the Professional Practice of Internal Auditing.
2. In February 2009, the Records Management and Archives Unit (RMAU) was merged with the Mail/Pouch Unit and Reproduction Unit and consolidated into the Information Management Unit (IMU). The IMU is responsible for promoting peacekeeping record management best practices within the Mission, providing advice and guidance to staff on recordkeeping and archiving and regularly monitoring recordkeeping practices across all UNMIL sites/locations to ensure that information captured is relevant, accessible and secure.
3. The Secretary-General's bulletins ST/SGB/2007/5 and ST/SGB/2007/6 both dated 12 February 2007 set out the rules and procedures to be followed in respect of an effective and efficient records and archives management system. In addition, the Recordkeeping Toolkit for Peacekeeping Operations (Toolkit) offers valuable guidelines for establishing recordkeeping systems.
4. The IMU is made up of four teams i.e., the Records Management Team, the Archives Team, the Mail/Pouch Team and the Reproduction Team. The IMU is headed by a staff member at the P-3 level who is supported by two United Nations Volunteers (UNVs), one field service staff and eight assistants and clerks.
5. Comments made by UNMIL are shown in *italics*.

## II. AUDIT OBJECTIVES

6. The main objectives of the audit were to assess compliance with established records management and archiving rules, guidelines and procedures, and gain assurance that:
  - (i) Records management ensures that the Mission will preserve its financial, legal, administrative and historical information during the drawdown and eventual liquidation of the Mission; and
  - (ii) Confidential/sensitive information and documents are handled appropriately.

## III. AUDIT SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

7. The audit reviewed records management practices of the Mission for the period from July 2007 to June 2009 and focused on compliance with Secretary-General's Bulletins, Information Circulars, and guidelines from UN Archive and Records Management Section (ARMS) in Headquarters, as well as policy
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directives from the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Department of Field Support (DFS).

8. A questionnaire was sent to all offices to determine the level of support provided by IMU to records management focal points. Twelve offices were selected for a more detailed review and interviews were conducted with the relevant focal points.

9. The audit also interviewed key personnel involved in records management and archiving, and inspected storage facilities at various offices and UNMIL archives at the Pan African Plaza building.

## **IV. AUDIT FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Records Management**

#### Records management programme

10. According to Section 2 of the Toolkit, developed by ARMS, the Records Management Officer is responsible for implementing a Mission-wide records management programme and for developing records management procedures and practices specific to Mission needs. An effective records management programme requires a clear definition of objectives, responsibilities and authorities, as well as sufficient resources.

11. The Mission has not established a Mission-wide records management programme that specifies the objectives, scope and resource requirements. Information Circular 2009/014 of 18 February 2009 is the first available document that mentions the strengthening of the Mission's records management programme, and the need for increased efforts to prepare for the eventual liquidation of the Mission.

12. Effective January 2008, the Mission has entered the drawdown phase of the UNMIL consolidation, drawdown and withdrawal plan. Consequently it needs to appraise, identify and prepare for eventual transfer to all records of financial, legal, administrative and historical value to ARMS to ensure important records are safeguarded and properly archived.

13. Of the 12 offices reviewed by OIOS, only five had developed a file plan. This plan is necessary for establishing the mandated peacekeeping File Classification Scheme and for applying the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule (PORS). Of the five offices that had a file plan only one office's actual files in the cabinets corresponded to the plan. None of the offices reviewed had applied PORS.

14. The Mission has not adopted an electronic recordkeeping system and has been requested to wait for the roll-out of the ARMS approved Electronic Content Management (ECM) system which is presently being piloted. However, there is

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already a correspondence logging system, introduced in the offices of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG), the Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (DSRSG) and the Director of Mission Support (DMS). This system is used extensively throughout the UN for registering incoming and outgoing mail and has an efficient tracking system. Other offices within the Mission were not aware of this system and reverted to using a manual system to register outgoing mail. Incoming mail was stamped and dated but not registered and therefore not tracked.

15. The lack of a formal records management programme that establishes policies and procedures to manage records mission-wide may result in diminished accountability and the loss of data when transferring records to archives. Furthermore, it could hinder preparation for the liquidation of the Mission and result in unplanned expenses.

#### **Recommendation 1**

**(1) The UNMIL Information Management Unit should prepare a records management programme for the Mission using best practices as identified by the UN Archives and Records Management Section in order to harmonize and standardize recordkeeping practices throughout the Mission and prepare it for the eventual liquidation.**

16. *The UNMIL Management accepted recommendation 1 and stated that the preparation of a records management programme had started and full implementation would be achieved by July 2010.* Recommendation 1 remains open pending evidence of full implementation of a records management programme.

### **B. Archives Management**

#### Retrieval process

17. According to Section 13 of the Toolkit on Managing Records in a Mission Records Storage Facility, transfers to storage need to be adequately controlled to facilitate retrieval and further disposition actions such as destruction or transfer of documents to ARMS. It further mentions that records in semi-active storage should not be frequently required, however, it should be possible to retrieve them if needed to support current business requirements or for audit purposes.

18. An Excel spreadsheet called an "accession register" is used by UNMIL Archives Team to register the transfer of boxes of records from offices. The accession register gives no description or number of files in the boxes or its location in the storage room. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the total number of files or records in the archives. As an audit test, OIOS requested the Archives Assistant to retrieve selected records. However, these records could not be found. It should be noted that 822 boxes have already been transferred to archives.

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19. Form-51 is used for the retrieval of semi-active files, and periodically, reminders are sent to those holding these records to ensure they are returned in a timely manner. OIOS observed that 18 files were still outstanding for an average of eight months although it is recommended that such files if not returned to archives after one month are reinstated as active files.

20. The Form-51 for the release of inactive files requires authorization from the designated officer. The controls over the release of files was inadequate, which was concerning, as most of the retrieved documents related to personnel files, which are confidential in nature. OIOS found that of the of the 27 Form-51s reviewed only four were authorized by the Chief, Civilian Personnel Officer or her alternate, while others were signed out by Human Resources clerks, who do not have the authority to do this.

21. Since the arrival of the Chief of IMU a system has been introduced to capture the required information for the transfer of records to archives. A complete physical inventory of the records in archives is being done, and the Unit is developing a separate location register and a retrieval system for the Archives Team.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**(2) The UNMIL Information Management Unit should implement a recordkeeping system that facilitates access, location, retrieval, and accountability for safeguarding of documents.**

22. *The UNMIL Management accepted recommendation 2 and stated that the accession and location spreadsheets were already introduced and guidelines were under preparation.* Recommendation 2 remains open pending OIOS verification that a reliable system is in place that facilitates the access of documents and ensures that they are adequately safeguarded.

#### **C. Compliance with rules and procedures**

##### Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule (PORS)

23. Section 4 of ST/SGB/2007/5 specifies that departments and offices should develop and implement a policy for the retention of records through a records retention schedule approved by ARMS. Section 8 of the Toolkit indicates that PORS is mandated for use in all peacekeeping missions. The use of PORS should be the prime responsibility of the Records Management Officer who is responsible for the disposition of all Mission records and the documenting of all records disposals.

24. For the fiscal years 2007-2008 and 2008-2009 the IMU had included the implementation of a PORS policy. However, no action has been taken to develop and implement a policy. IMU has re-included this as a sub-goal in their 2009-2010 work plan.

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25. The Mission has reached its sixth year and therefore, there is a large accumulation of records in each office. As a result action needs to be taken to develop a retention schedule and an organized plan for the disposition of records. Without this, UNMIL may lose track of its vital records and may incur avoidable costs by shipping and subsequently storing unnecessary records in ARMS.

### **Recommendation 3**

**(3) The UNMIL Information Management Unit should conduct an assessment of all Mission records, prepare and circulate guidelines and establish timelines for the application of the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule to all active, semi-active and inactive records.**

26. *The UNMIL Management accepted recommendation 3 and stated that an inventory of the Mission's records is being prepared and a survey to focal points will be distributed in October 2009.* Recommendation 3 remains open pending OIOS verification of the application of PORS to records in the Mission.

### Vital Records

27. Section 4.5 of ST/SGB/2007/5 specifies that offices shall develop procedures to identify and manage their vital records as part of the overall disaster recovery and business continuity planning for the Mission. In July 2009, the IMU was requested to prepare their business continuity plan for inclusion in the UNMIL Crisis Management and Business Continuity Plan.

28. The PORS have identified seven offices that may have vital records in the Mission. However, the offices of the SRSG, DSRSGs and Force Commander were not mentioned in the PORS and it is likely that they will have vital records that need to be retained.

29. OIOS interviewed five of the chiefs of sections of the offices with designated vital records as per PORS. None of them had yet identified their vital records. A review of the business continuity plans for Procurement and Finance Sections showed that they had not included the protection, recovery and reconstruction of their vital records.

30. Work plans for the last two years and the current year mention the need to identify and register vital records and to create a vital records plan. However, to date no instructions have been issued by the Office of Mission Support to ensure this is done in a systematic and timely manner.

### **Recommendation 4**

**(4) The UNMIL Office of Mission Support should ensure that a vital records plan is prepared and included in the Mission's Crisis Management and Business Continuity Plan.**

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31. *The UNMIL Management accepted recommendation 4 and stated that the preparation of a vital records plan had started and strategies for safeguarding vital records will be established as part of risk management analysis in cooperation with sections concerned.* Recommendation 4 remains open pending receipt of a copy of the plan and strategy for safeguarding vital records.

Handling of sensitive information and documents

32. Section 5 of ST/SGB/2007/6 on information sensitivity, classification and handling and UNMIL Administrative Instruction 2007/001 of 2 April 2007 on the same topic, requires that sensitive records be registered, filed and stored under lock and key in a secure location within the office. Staff authorized to handle such information must be listed. For sensitive records of a recurrent nature such as code cables, offices must establish standard distribution lists to provide an auditable system for the distribution and control of such information.

33. OIOS observed the following deviations from the above policy:

- The offices of the SRSG and the two DSRSGs did not register classified incoming and outgoing information. The correspondence logging system was used for outgoing mail while incoming mail was stamped and dated and copied for the chronology file. All international staff in the three offices were handling sensitive information with no authorized delegation;
- The office of the DSRSG, (Rule of Law) had a cabinet with a broken lock for filing sensitive/confidential information. One Administrative Assistant was tasked to file these records. When the staff member was on leave the records awaited her return in an open tray in the office of the Assistant to the DSRSG;
- The office of the DSRSG, (Recovery and Governance) did not treat sensitive information different from all other incoming mail. Confidential records are filed along with non-confidential material in subject files;
- The Code Distribution list of staff authorized to pick up and drop off code cables from the Communication Center (ComCen) was prepared by the ComCen instead of the Office of the SRSG and 63 per cent of staff on that list provided to OIOS had already left the Mission. The register at ComCen is signed before the code cable is given to the staff member; however, no authentication is done to verify the signature; and
- Note Verbales (NVs) are stamped by the Office of the Senior Legal Advisor (OSLA) and initialed by the originating office. Of the nine NVs issued in 2009 only one had the name and designation of the official who initialed the document. Names and signatures of those authorized to sign NVs are not circulated to Ministries and Embassies. Furthermore,

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reference numbers are not sequential and therefore could not be used as a control mechanism.

34. It is important to classify records and properly safeguard them, as inappropriate disclosure may be detrimental to the Missions operations or may affect the welfare and safety of staff.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**(5) The UNMIL Office of Mission Support should: (a) ensure that the Mission fully complies with ST/SGB/2007/6 and UNMIL Administrative Instruction 2007/001 with regard to handling of sensitive information; and (b) strengthen the controls over code cables and Note Verbale.**

35. *The UNMIL Management accepted recommendation 5 and issued Administrative Instruction 2009/002 on 31 August 2009 to reiterate the provisions of ST/SGB/2007/6. A training module on managing sensitive information was also included in focal points' training. Recommendation 5 remains open pending confirmation that focal points have been trained on the handling of sensitive information.*

#### **D. Knowledge management**

##### Safeguarding institutional memory

36. Handover notes, as stated in the Best Practices Toolbox are to provide the staff member's successor with key knowledge and information regarding the position to ease the transition process. UNMIL Information Circular 2007/086 on handover notes requires staff leaving their position to submit handover notes to their successor as part of the Mission check-out process.

37. OIOS selected 10 offices including IMU to verify the adequacy of the handover process. Six of the 10 reported that handover notes were not received or were insufficient to ensure the smooth functioning of the office. For instance, the Chief, IMU received a one page e-mail from her predecessor, and the information presented did not provide an adequate status report on the work done by the Unit or to be done. Also, the files in the IMU office were empty and there was no data available on the shared drive. The audit found that handover notes were often sent to Human Resources to complete the check-out process, but not handed over to the successor or office concerned.

38. With inadequacies in the handover process there is a risk that the process may be used for the purpose of checking out without consideration for knowledge sharing or the continuation of the function.

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## Recommendation 6

**(6) The UNMIL Office of Mission Support should review the Handover Notes process and strengthen it by adding the elements of quality control, relevance and accountability.**

39. *The UNMIL Management accepted recommendation 6 and stated that the handover process will be improved by introducing a requirement for official records to be handed over and section chiefs/focal points to be responsible for safeguarding them. In addition, a Best Practices Officer will be tasked with adding the general elements of quality control, relevance and accountability to the handover process.* Based on the assurances provided by management that action is being taken, recommendation 6 has been closed.

### Awareness building and dissemination of information

40. Information Circular 2009/014 of 18 February 2009 referred to the development and promotion of an advocacy strategy to create and sustain awareness on the benefits of good recordkeeping practices.

41. Interviews with 12 focal points confirmed that there was a general lack of awareness on records management requirements and tools in the Mission and all indicated that they would welcome more information through the intranet site. Additionally, four of the 12 focal points were not aware that they could access the ARMS website for guidance, and two of the focal points were not aware that there was a records management training course provided by the Mission.

42. OIOS was informed that there were plans to populate the webpage once guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures were finalized. However, by delaying the populating of the intranet page with information currently available, there is a risk that the Mission may not be able to implement its records management programme successfully due to lack of awareness amongst the responsible players.

## Recommendation 7

**(7) The UNMIL Information Management Unit should populate the UNMIL webpage for Information Management with documents that are currently available such as Secretary-General's Bulletins, Information Circulars and links to relevant records management sites. The webpage can be updated once new guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures are finalized.**

43. *The UNMIL Management accepted recommendation 7 and stated that the IMU would begin populating the webpage with UN publications, guidelines and bulletins on records management and Unit Team's activities.* Based on the assurances provided by management that action is being taken, recommendation 7 has been closed.

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## **V. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

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

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## STATUS OF AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Risk category	Risk rating	C/O <sup>1</sup>	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date <sup>2</sup>
1	The UNMIL Information Management Unit should prepare a records management programme for the Mission using best practices as identified by the UN Archives and Records Management Section in order to harmonize and standardize recordkeeping practices throughout the Mission and prepare it for the eventual liquidation.	Governance	High	O	Evidence of full implementation of a records management programme.	July 2010
2	The UNMIL Information Management Unit should implement a recordkeeping system that facilitates access, location, retrieval, and accountability for safeguarding of documents.	Operational	Medium	O	Verification that a reliable system is in place that facilitates the access of documents and ensures that they are adequately safeguarded.	November 2009
3	The UNMIL Information Management Unit should conduct an assessment of all Mission records, prepare and circulate guidelines and establish timelines for the application of the Peacekeeping Operations Retention Schedule to all active, semi-active and inactive records.	Compliance	Medium	O	Verification of the application of PORS to records in the Mission.	July 2010
4	The UNMIL Office of Mission Support should ensure that a vital records plan is prepared and included in the Mission's Crisis Management and Business Continuity Plan.	Compliance	Medium	O	Receipt of a copy of the plan and strategy for the safeguarding of vital records.	March/April 2010
5	The UNMIL Office of Mission Support should: (a) ensure that the Mission fully complies with ST/SGB/2007/6 and	Compliance	High	O	Confirmation that focal points have been trained on the handling of sensitive information.	March 2010

Recom. no.	Recommendation	Risk category	Risk rating	C/O <sup>1</sup>	Actions needed to close recommendation	Implementation date <sup>2</sup>
	UNMIL AI2007/001 with regard to handling of sensitive information; and (b) strengthen the controls over code cables and Notes Verbale.					
7	The UNMIL Office of Mission Support should review the Handover Notes process and strengthen it by adding the elements of quality control, relevance and accountability.	Operational	Medium	C	Action taken.	September 2009
8	The UNMIL Chief, Information Management Unit should populate the UNMIL webpage for Information Management with documents that are currently available such as Secretary-General's Bulletins, Information Circulars and links to relevant records management sites. The webpage can be updated once new guidelines and Standard Operating Procedures are finalized.	Operational	Medium	C	Action taken.	October 2009

1. C = closed, O = open
2. Date provided by UNMIL in response to recommendations.