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TO: Eleanor T. Burns, Chief
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Internal Audit Division, OIOS

DATE: 1 December 2011

FROM: Mr. Staffan de Mistura
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan



SUBJECT: **Response to Draft Audit Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS),**
REF: Assignment no. AP2011/630/04 - Audit of public information programme in UNAMA

The Strategic Communications and Spokespersons Unit appreciates the presentation of the “Draft Audit Report: Audit of the public information programme in UNAMA”, as well as the constructive spirit of the process of the audit and the generally useful draft recommendations. The SCSU presents the following response in the same constructive spirit, aiming to continue to improve management and risk mitigation measures within the Unit’s programme of work.

The SCSU presents its response in three parts: 1) a brief overview response to the Draft Report; 2) observations on the accuracy of text in specific paragraphs; and 3) specific responses to the report’s three recommendations.

1. Overview

Overall, the SCSU considers the findings of the audit fair, and the recommendations as presenting useful management guidance. We do believe that some of the findings do not reflect fully accurate on the work of the Unit, in part because they tend to generalize the work of the Unit through the audit period (January 2010 to June 2011) when in fact this was a period of considerable flux and then directed change within the Mission and Unit.

cc: Mr. Manuel Calzada, OIC Chief of Staff, UNAMA
Ms. Stephani Scheer, Chief of Missions Support, UNAMA
Ms. Denise Jeanmonod, OIC Strategic Communications and Spokespersons Unit, UNAMA
Ms. Amy Wong, Programme Officer, Internal Audit Division, OIOS

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The SCSU believes that an understanding and analysis of the programme and management measures of the Unit during this 18 month period need to take into full account the fact that:

- 1) From January to May 2010 there was no director of the SCSU, and the second most senior position, the P-5 position, was also vacant.
- 2) From January 2010 to May 2010 there was no international Field Services administrative assistant in the Unit.
- 3) In January 2010 international staff of the SCSU, those who remained with the Mission, had just returned from the relocation to Dubai following the October 2009 attack on the Kabul Bakhtar Guest House – this, combined with lack of senior leadership in the Unit, profoundly affected the programme and management of the Unit.
- 4) When the new director of the Unit began work on 27 May, UNAMA had a freeze on international recruitments: this meant that the SCSU was frozen with a nearly 50% vacancy rate until early 2011 (we could not responsibly recruit the significant number of national vacancies without professional international public information officers to supervise and mentor new national staff).
- 5) When deployments were allowed again in early 2011, it took until March 2011 to deploy most of the key new international staffs and through March-April to recruit and deploy new national staffs. The draft report, for example when it comments on the regional programme, does not adequately take into account that this programme was effectively running for less than four months at the close of the audit period. The programme had barely had a chance to be settled down. While the audit recommendations can provide valuable guidance for what is required, the findings lack the value of this contextualizing.

2. Observation on accuracy of general text of paragraphs of the Draft Audit Report

In this part of the SCSU response, we only highlight those paragraphs where we consider that the text is inaccurate or factually incorrect.

Paragraph 9:

The SCSU does not believe that the Draft Audit Report accurately reflects the level of consultation the Unit undertook with both regional heads of offices and provincial heads of offices in the development of the Concept of Operations, the workplans and the Strategic Plan. The director of the SCSU participated in all Kabul-based Heads of Regional Offices meetings, with a specific agenda slot for Strategic Communications where, from June 2010, he discussed with Heads of Offices the aim to develop a new concept of operations and strategic plan and actively solicited their views on the priorities. These discussions, for example, specifically resulted in the new funds allocated for regional public information activities – a direct response to requests by Heads of Offices.

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The development of a regional radio series resulted in consultations initially between the director of the SCSU and the Head of Office of Herat/Western Region (when the director visited the Western Regional Office following the attack on the office in October 2010). The expansion of this programme to other regions followed direct consultations with other Heads of Offices, who told the SCSU that they wanted this.

The director of the SCSU also travelled to the Northern Region/Kunduz and held direct meetings on the ground with the Head of Office about the strategic plan for communications; to Mazar-i-Sharif/North Western Region where he met with the Head of Office and other officers including Political, Governance and Human Rights; and to the Eastern Region/Jalalabad and met with regional officers from other sections of UNAMA and the UN Country Team about the strategic plan for communications (the Head of Office was away at the time). In addition, the SCSU had a policy of meeting with Heads of Regional and Heads of Provincial Offices when they visited Kabul for other business: for example, the cross section briefing organized by the SCSU for the visiting Head of Tirinkot Provincial Office, and many individual meetings with individual Heads of Regional Offices (eg Gardez/South Eastern Region; Herat/Western Region on a number of occasions; Kandahar/Southern Region). In addition, the director of the SCSU had telephonic and email contact with Heads of Offices frequently. Further, the director and various officers of the SCSU met almost weekly with visiting officers from regional and Provincial Offices, from specific disciplines (eg human rights).

Other members of the SCSU travelled to Regional Offices throughout this period, and met with Heads of Offices and staffs from UNAMA sections other than the SCSU to hold discussions about the programme planning. From late 2010, the SCSU redeployed one international staff member to set up the new Outreach and Special Projects Unit to specifically strengthen coordination with Regional and Provincial Offices – which he did on a daily basis with various parts of these Offices, not limited to SCSU colleagues.

The audit team did not raise these matters of consultation with Heads of Offices or other components of regional offices with the director in their interviews with him. The text which makes conclusions in this regard is therefore factually incorrect and inaccurate.

Specifically, the finding in paragraph 9 that the implementation of the regional radio series did not go according to plan was due to lack of consultation with Heads of Offices is wrong in fact, and the SCSU submits that it should be deleted. Equally, the statement that “only regional PIO officers were consulted by SCSU” is also wrong in fact, and the SCSU submits that this text should be deleted.

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Paragraph 10

While it is reasonable to say that the acting Head and Head of two regional offices told the visiting audit team that they would like more involvement in the planning process for the SCSU, and that it is fair to say that more involvement is always a good thing, the SCSU considers that this paragraph is based on very partial methodology (two quick visits to regions), and does not take into account, for example, the details set out above in relation to Paragraph 9 about the extensive outreach of the director and other staff of the SCSU with regional colleagues.

Paragraph 11

The SCSU informed the auditors that it had made full preparations to bring in a specialist to develop with the team an industry-standard professional monitoring and evaluation framework, and to train all staffs in the application of this framework. The implementation of this consultancy was delayed due first to a change in availability of the selected consultant and then to changed security conditions which mitigated against bringing anyone except recognized essential personnel. Since this time, the consultant has not yet been available again, but the SCSU continues to plan for this consultancy.