

Audit of the management of selected major conferences –
2010 Millennium Development Goals (DMG) Summit
11-00669 Assignment No. AH2011/550/01
Draft Report of Detailed Results

*Comments of
Department for General Assembly and Conference Management*

Section II - Audit objective:

The Department for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM) has welcomed the internal audit workplan for 2011, in particular this audit, which it considered relevant to the mandate of DGACM, and should prove very useful in guiding DGACM in its mission to provide efficient and cost-effective, quality conference services to Member States.

In its comments on the proposed audit (email of Hesham Auda to Fatoumata Ndiaye dated 1 December 2010 refers), DGACM indicated that the audit was an outcome of, or follow to, a previous OIOS audit of conference services put at the disposal of the Human Rights Council in 2009 (A/64/511 of 30 October 2009), pursuant to the General Assembly resolution 63/284 of 23 July 2009. That audit has concluded that insufficient resources were put at the disposal of the Division of Conference Management (DCM), United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG), to provide conference services to the Human Rights Council. DGACM further stressed that the stated objective of the audit -- the provision of reasonable assurances on the adequacy and effectiveness of internal controls in planning and holding major conferences -- remained dependent on the availability of resources to service those conferences.

In response (email of Fatoumata Ndiaye to Hesham Auda of 6 December 2010 refers), OIOS stated that the Internal Audit Division (IAD) of OIOS was conducting an audit of funding and costing of conferences services at UNOG, and would take a similar audit at the United Nations Office at Vienna (UNOV) in 2011. It further stated that IAD would be conducting this audit in New York in 2012, and would then be able provide an assessment on whether resources for conference management were adequate globally. Given that funding and costing of conference services is a critical factor, and a major risk category, of conference management, DGACM underscores the need to carry out that audit in New York to draw appropriate conclusions and present system-wide recommendations.

Section III - Audit Scope and Methodology:

The notification of planned OIOS audit of 22 December 2010 indicated that the audit of the management of selected major conferences would address the following subjects:

- DGACM: The General Debate of the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly

- OHCHR: The forty-fourth session of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
- UNFCCC: The fifteenth session of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention

Upon inquiry, DGACM was informed that the planned scope of the audit has changed and provided substantive and logistical clarifications. DGACM concurs with the selection of the 2010 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) Summit as an alternate subject of the audit, but is of the view that the breadth of the initial scope notified would have allowed deeper examination of the critical factors underlying the management of major conferences on a wider scale, in particular when paired with the outcome of the planned audits of funding and costing of conference servicing globally.

Section IV – Overall Assessment:

DGACM takes note of the assessments provided in the draft report presented. In particular, DGACM takes notes of the overall assessment that, in the opinion of OIOS, governance, risk management, and control processes examined were partially satisfactory in providing reasonable assurances regarding the management of major conferences, vis-à-vis internal control objectives. DGACM will be fully implementing the recommendation given, and pursuing the opportunities for improvement presented, with a view to establishing an assurance mechanism for achieving of stated control and/or business objectives.

While DGACM generally agrees with the approach and outcome of the audit, including the recommendation and opportunities for improvement, it nevertheless would like to underscore the fact that an important risk of the conference management alluded to in its comments under section I has not been considered in the assessment. DGCAM is also of the view that, while the change of scope has accorded the audit the opportunity to focus on a single major conference and draw appropriate recommendations and opportunities for improvements, it has also limited it from comparing findings drawn from the examination of other major conferences carried out in by different conference services under different circumstances.

DGACM would also like to point out that it finds the presentation of the categorical and overall assessment results uninformative, as it did not provide any guidance as to how the audit reached its conclusions. DGACM would like to obtain clarifications in regards of the specific controls used in each category, the scales utilized for performance measuring, the manner in which individual measures were aggregated, and the thresholds for the ratings given.

Factual Inaccuracies:

Paragraph 18:

The draft report duly recognized the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) for its effort in supporting intergovernmental consultations by providing assistance to the co-facilitators of the MDG Summit. Unmentioned in the report was that the General Assembly and ECOSOC

Affairs Division (GAEAD) was the Conference's technical secretariat (while DESA was its substantive secretariat), and has provided valuable assistance during the conference, including to the facilitators, on the organizational planning of the Summit.

Paragraph 23:

It should be noted that lessons learned of major conferences, as far as conference management is concerned, are coordinated system-wide by GAEAD, documented, and shared with participating departments and offices in a systematic manner. An example was submitted to OIOS' audit team at its request.

Annex I - Recommendations:

Paragraph 32:

DGACM, in collaboration with DSS, should reassess the arrangements for granting access to United Nations conference and meeting rooms by delegates

DGACM agrees to the recommendation.

The Protocol and Liaison Service (PLS), in collaboration with the Department of Safety and Security (DSS), has instituted new measures for enhancing physical access controls to United Nations conference and meeting rooms to prevent unauthorized entry by non-accredited persons. As part of the implementation of a policy decision taken on 1 September 2011, all access passes to the General Assembly Hall during the high-level meetings and the General Debate of the current session of the General Assembly carried a United Nations security hologram which cannot be duplicated.

PLS has held discussions with DGACM information technology (IT) system developers and DSS to put in place an electronic system of accreditation and access control which will address the weakness of the current system of colour coded access passes. PLS intends to hold further discussions with DSS, the Capital Master Plan (CMP), and other relevant Offices within DGACM to further assess and enhance the quality of access control measures as they relate to conference and meeting rooms at Headquarters in New York.

Upon consultation, DSS advised DGACM that it is in agreement with the recommendation, and indicated that the Division of Headquarters Security and Safety Services (DSSS) in New York will continue to coordinate and collaborate in support of DGACM and PLS to implement this recommendation.

Annex II - Opportunities for improvement:

Paragraph 17:

EOSG could enhance its processes for planning major conferences by specifying indicators of achievement that could be used to determine the extent to which success criteria have been met.

DGACM has no comments since the action owner is the Executive Office of the Secretary-General (EOSG).

Paragraph 20:

DESA needs to dispose of unspent MDG trust fund balances in accordance with the instructions stipulated in the donor agreement.

DGACM has no comments since the action owner is DESA.

Paragraph 24:

DGACM could coordinate formal lessons learned exercises after major conferences to capture and disseminate both substantive and logistics lessons learned to add to the existing knowledge base and enable effective and efficient management of major conferences in future.

DGACM takes note of the opportunity for improvement, but would like to point out that the exercise recommended, as far as conference management is concerned, is regularly coordinated system-wide by GAEAD in the form of interdepartmental meetings on lessons learned, with participation from conference services and all the relevant substantive departments. Substantive secretariats are more suited to carry out similar exercises in regards the substantive lessons learned from major conferences.

GAEAD will continue with this practice in the comprehensive manner indicated in the draft audit report in the future, with a view to add to the existing knowledge base and to be useful for preparing for future major conferences.

Paragraph 29:

DGACM needs to clarify the basis for accrediting delegates to ensure their credentials are appropriately scrutinized

DGACM takes note of the opportunity for improvement, but is of the view that reference should also be made to the need for collaboration with the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) to clarify the basis for accreditation of delegates.

PLS is in the process of updating its manual of Protocol. PLS intends to fully describe the process of accreditation in its updated manual and to bring its practice of strict scrutiny of applicants' credentials, where applicable, into greater focus. PLS will further update the Manual of Protocol once the proposed electronic system of accreditation has been implemented.

Paragraph 39:

DGACM could improve its quality assurance procedures by establishing more specific criteria to assess the quality of interpretation by staff members and freelance interpreters each year.

DGACM takes note of the opportunity for improvement, and would like to point out that discussions are already underway in the Interpretation Service (IS) to determine a representative set of assignments to be reviewed annually to assess the quality of interpretation of individual staff members and freelance interpreters, with a view to implementing the assurance of quality measures without requiring additional resources.

Meanwhile, IS will continue to apply its time-tested quality assessment procedures mentioned in paragraph 38.