

STATEMENT BY MR. JAIDEEP MAZUMDAR, COUNSELLOR ON REPORT
OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OFFICE OF
INTERNAL OVERSIGHT SERVICES (MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF THE
OFFICE OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR HUMAN
RIGHTS) (AGENDA ITEM 122) AT FIFTH COMMITTEE ON MARCH 4, 2003

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, we wish to record our pleasure at seeing you again chairing the deliberations of this Committee in this the first resumed session of the 57th General Assembly.

My delegation would like to congratulate Under Secretary General Mr. Dileep Nair and the OIOS for the excellent report on the Management Review of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights contained in document A/57/488. We attach importance to the work of the OHCHR. The present report, which is incisive as well as comprehensive, has clearly brought out the problems being faced by the OHCHR and their underlying causes.

Of immediate concern is the distortion in the system of funding of the OHCHR. There has been a rapid increase in extra budgetary funding in relation to regular budgetary resources in the financing of its operational activities. Extra budgetary resources more than doubled – from US\$ 36 million in 1996-97 to US\$ 79 million in 2000-2001. This implies that extra budgetary resources now finance 67 per cent of the OHCHR budget. What is of even greater concern is that the mandated core activities of the Office are today largely supported by these voluntary contributions rather than by the regular budget. The OIOS report has rightly pointed out that this is not a healthy situation.

My delegation concurs with the observation of the OIOS that OHCHR has over the years acquired additional responsibilities and mandates in an ad hoc and uncoordinated way which does not match its resources, either in terms of finance or in expertise available within the organization. It is necessary for the General Assembly to be kept fully apprised of resource implications arising from additional mandates and activities proposed for the OHCHR before these are approved. The report notes that this has not been done consistently in the past.

The unplanned growth of mandates and activities has resulted in duplication of effort, inefficiencies and inadequate follow-up. The Office has found it increasingly difficult to service member States, so much so that it is unable to carry out timely completion of such primary

functions as the examination of country reports of member States, of which there is a huge backlog.

This unplanned growth of mandates and activities has resulted in another unhealthy development which is the creation of a cumbersome and unwieldy bureaucracy. The Report notes that with the ad hoc creation of teams and units, the three Branches of the organization have become bloated with the strength of each branch ranging from 50 to over 100 Professional staff – which is far more than the conventional strength of divisions within the UN Secretariat. Along with the rationalization of the work of the OHCHR, it would also be necessary to address the issue of staff strength and their level to bring it in line with what budgetary resources the organization can sustain.

An upshot of the present situation characterized by high proportion of extra budgetary resources is that such resources finance 45% of all professional staff of the OHCHR in Geneva and 93% of all staff in the field. Such staff account for 47% of all staff performing the core functions of the Office. Not only are such staff not subject to the same stringency of UN rules and regulations in terms of recruitment and promotion, use of project staff in such large numbers have made personnel management complicated and controversial. Assignment of line functions to such staff which the report notes is widely prevalent is most undesirable.

The Report also concludes that this situation has adversely affected the geographical distribution of OHCHR staff and consultants. The bias in favour of representation from Western Europe and North America is on account of a direct correlation between voluntary contribution and staffing distribution. Although no figures are indicated separately for field level Professional staff, we can expect a very highly skewed representation since as many as 92 out of 99 Professional staff in the field are financed from extra budgetary resources. This is also highly undesirable and calls into question the very rationale for maintenance of a large field level presence when regular budgetary resources are inadequate to maintain it.

The enhanced use of information technology in the management system and the strengthening of administrative and financial management in the OHCHR are other important recommendations of the OIOS that should be considered a matter of priority.

These are only some of the observations of the OIOS that merit serious attention. The recommendations contained in the Report are sound and practical. The analysis is rigorous. We were heartened to hear yesterday from Under Secretary General Nair that the High Commissioner has submitted his report on strengthening of the management of the OHCHR to the Secretary General and that this report reflects the progress achieved in implementing OIOS recommendations. We are keen that the present recommendations do not meet the same fate as that of over 100 outstanding recommendations resulting from similar exercises in improving the OHCHR management. We keenly await the opportunity to discuss this report and its implementation.

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