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Information and communication
technologies for development

**POLICIES OF UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM ORGANIZATIONS TOWARDS
THE USE OF OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE FOR DEVELOPMENT**

(A/61/94 and A/61/94/Add.1)

Joint Inspection Unit

**Response to comments by the Secretary-General and
the United Nations
Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB)**

By

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Vice-Chairman

The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), “Policies of United Nations system organizations towards the use of open source software for development”, focuses on the potential role of open source software in achieving the specific objectives set in the Millennium Development Goals and the Plan of Action adopted by the World Summit on the Information Society.

This report is the second of a two-part review of the policies of the United Nations system organizations regarding the use of open source software (OSS). The first report, entitled “Policies of United Nations system organizations towards the use of open source software in the secretariats” was finalised by the Unit in 2005 and published in February 2006 (A/60/665).

The Unit is pleased to note that CEB members concurred with and supported the recommendations contained in the second report on OSS.

However, the Unit would like to express its regret for not being in a position to have introduced this report to the 2nd Committee, due to the very short notice (48 hours). JIU also regrets that it was not able to provide its reply to the CEB comments (A/61.94/Add. 1) on time for the discussion of this topic, as they were posted on ODS just prior to the discussion.

Unfortunately, summary records of the discussions of 2nd Committee concerning our report are not yet available. Therefore, we are not in a position to address, at this time, any specific questions that might have been raised. Consequently, we are limiting our remarks to the written comments made by CEB in document A/61/94/Add.1.

We would like to share with the Second Committee our views at this time:

1. The idea that the JIU review should have assessed the extent to which OSS provides advantages over other software models, gives the impression that this was not the case. The report points out to substantial evidence and many concrete and well-documented factual examples where OSS can and is providing value. Numerous other examples could have been provided, but the Inspector did not do so to limit the length of the report. It should be noted that the principle objective of this report was to raise awareness of the Member States and generate their interest on the use of OSS for development activities, not to exhaust all the issues that are to be faced when using OSS in a development context.

2. With respect to the use of the terminology, “open sources software” versus “free and open source software”, we are surprised that this comment was made, as this matter was clearly explained both in this report (see paragraph 1) and in our first report on the use of OSS in the Secretariats (A/60/665, paragraphs 14 and 16).

3. Regarding the use of OSS, the CEB pointed out that the report did not take into consideration the availability of electricity and telecommunications, as well as of human resources, entrepreneurship and managerial abilities. The Unit fails to understand this comment in relation to the advantages and disadvantages of the use of OSS. These preconditions apply equally to other type of software, not only OSS.

4. With respect to the comments made by CEB on Recommendation 2, it is clear in the report that the JIU does not advocate the exclusive use of OSS, but recommends its use based on judicious consideration. The JIU pointed out that the total cost of ownership (TCO) varies widely based on geographical regions, organisational context and availability of skills. The Unit also underscored that TCO models based exclusively on economic factors might not appropriately consider the strategic and social benefits such as developing local capacity/industry, enhancing national security, reducing imports or providing access to information.

5. As for the comments made by CEB on Recommendation 3, the Unit is obviously well aware that software development is not the main function of the United Nations organisations. However, when funds contributed by Member States are used for developing software applications within the UN System, the latter should be developed where possible under open source software licences and when useful, be made available to other stakeholders of those same Member States (government agencies, private sector, NGO’s etc.) to increase the efficiency of the funds utilised.

6. The Unit is convinced that (both within the UN System Secretariats and in the promotion of their development activities) open source software capabilities and potential could be better used to promote the use of information and communication technologies for the achievement of internationally agreed development goals, including those contained in the Millennium Declaration.
