

Business continuity in the United Nations system, JIU/REP/2011/6

Introduction of the report to the 5th Committee
by Inspector Istvan Posta

Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

I have the honour to introduce to you the JIU report titled "Business continuity in the United Nations system" (Business continuity) (JIU/REP/2011/6) which was issued by a note by the Secretary-General under the symbol A/67/83.

The Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) conducted a review of business continuity (BC) in the United Nations system organisations in 2011. The proposal for the review was supported by majority of the organisations in light of such real-life events causing interruptions in the operation as the earthquake in Santiago de Chile, the Egyptian "Arab Spring", and the floods in Copenhagen. Lessons learned from these events experienced by the UN system organisations are offered in the report. The recently caused interruption of the business continuity in the activity of the UN Headquarters in New York gives a special actuality to the consideration of the report.

The report overviews the existence of BC strategies/policies and plans, experiences and best practices relating to their implementation, the coordination mechanisms among the UN organisations, the functioning and staffing of specialised business continuity units, including their financing frameworks and funding for their operation.

The major finding of the report is that the general level of BC preparedness in the UN system organizations **is well below the recommended by the relevant international standards**. Only a handful of UN organizations have started BC implementation in a comprehensive way, most organizations are just recognizing it as an issue that needs to be addressed. There is a lack of understanding of the importance of the issue in the senior management, which further leads to inadequate political and financial support of Member States. We have noted that even when the major interruptions occurred the future assignment of resources or drawing the lessons learned were not handled as a priority.

Several weaknesses were identified: different elements of BC are handled in isolation instead of holistically; criteria for prioritizing critical functions and staff performing them are missing, resulting in a large number of activities deemed to be critical; recovery time objectives tend to be unrealistically short and when resumption of activities depends on information and communication technology (ICT), usually there is a gap between the requirements stated in the BC plans and what ICT offices can deliver. **The report concludes that in order to improve the low level of BC management in the UN system organizations, stronger senior leadership commitment and support of the Member States is required; dedicated human and financial resources need to be allocated; BC policies/strategies and plans need to be developed and responsibility for their implementation assigned.**

It is apparent that organizations which have dedicated units or persons for management of BC have more evolved BC management. However, placing it with security or information technology for example results in piecemeal approach with a heavy focus on that aspect of BC. We found that in order to achieve overall coherence in business continuity, BC managers should be placed in the office of the executive head or the executive office for management.

We found that most organizations lack the human and financial resources at headquarters to provide adequate technical guidance and assistance to their field offices. We further found that there was no close cooperation among UN entities in the field although they mostly face the same risks. Hence, our report recommends that the scope of BC plans should be organization-wide; there should be a mechanism of overview and control in place to ensure coherence and interoperability of the field offices' BC plans with their headquarters and with the UN country team. The resident coordinators should overview the knowledge sharing, cooperation and complementarity of BC preparedness of the UN organizations in their duty station.

We also found that insufficient assignment of responsibility and lack of accountability are damaging successful implementation. These tasks need to be included in the job descriptions and performance evaluations of line managers and BC coordinators.

General awareness of the UN staff of BC is low and there is no sufficient BC training offered, not even for BC managers. Organizations should ensure that BC training is incorporated in staff development and induction courses and that periodic training is provided to critical staff.

Inter-agency cooperation on BC issues is weak and of ad hoc nature. The efforts that do exist are personality driven and not institutionalized. There are economies of scale to be gained from mutual backups, a common approach to BC, interoperability of the organizations' BC plans, exchange of knowledge and expertise within the system etc. For this to happen, more organized system-wide discussion can be held within the HLCM/CEB forum.

Finally, the Inspectors found that **not providing adequate financial and human resources to sustain operability of the developed and approved BC plans is recipe for letting those plans become outdated, obsolete and eventually waste of the originally invested resources.** One only needs to look at previously developed programmes such as those for avian flu and pandemics to see that generally maintenance, review and updating were not given adequate attention and resources. Hence, **the JIU report calls for the legislative bodies of the UN organizations to provide, on the basis of the executive heads' budget proposals, proper resources in order to carry out required BC activities. I think this message of the report is even more actual and mandatory after having the experiences of hurricane Sandy.**

I will be pleased to receive your comments and to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman