



Highlights of [GAO-08-84](#), a report to the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States has advocated reforms of United Nations (UN) management for many years. In October 2006, GAO reported that UN management reforms were progressing slowly and that many were still awaiting review by the General Assembly. For this review, GAO was asked to (1) determine the progress of UN management reform initiatives in five key areas—ethics, oversight, procurement, management operations of the Secretariat, and review of programs and activities (known as mandates)—and (2) identify factors that have slowed the pace of reform efforts. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed documents relating to UN management reform and interviewed U.S. and UN officials.

What GAO Recommends

To encourage UN member states to continue to pursue the reform agenda of the 2005 World Summit, GAO recommends that, as management reforms are implemented over time, the Secretary of State and the U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN include in State's annual *U.S. Participation in the United Nations* report an assessment of the effectiveness of the reforms. State agreed with GAO's recommendation and generally endorsed GAO's findings and conclusions.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-84](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or melitot@gao.gov.

UNITED NATIONS

Progress on Management Reform Efforts Has Varied

What GAO Found

The progress of UN management reform efforts has varied in the five areas that GAO reviewed—ethics, oversight, procurement, management operations of the Secretariat, and review of programs and activities (known as mandates). To determine the status of these reform efforts, GAO developed three categories of progress, defined as follows:

Little or no progress = Few or no steps have been taken

Some progress = Some steps have been taken, while others remain

Substantial progress = The reform effort has been mostly or fully implemented

The ethics office has made substantial progress in staffing its office and implementing a whistleblower protection policy, as well as some progress in developing ethics standards and collecting and analyzing financial disclosure forms. Member states made some progress in improving oversight at the UN when they created an Independent Audit Advisory Committee, which is expected to be operational by January 2008. Additionally, the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) improved the capacity of individual divisions, including internal audit and investigations. However, UN funding arrangements continue to constrain the independence of OIOS and its ability to audit high-risk areas. Some progress has been made in the area of procurement, such as developing a comprehensive training program for procurement staff. However, the UN has made little or no progress in establishing an independent bid protest system. Some progress has been made in reforming management operations of the UN Secretariat, such as improving human resource functions and information technology. In contrast, little or no progress has been made in reforming the UN's internal justice system for resolving and adjudicating staff grievances and safeguarding the rights of staff members, certain budgetary and financial management functions, and the delivery of certain services. Finally, despite some limited initial actions, the UN's review of programs and activities (known as mandates) has not advanced due in part to a lack of support by many member states.

Various factors have slowed the pace of UN management reforms, and a number of reforms cannot move forward until these factors are addressed. Four key factors that have slowed the pace include (1) disagreements among member states on the priorities and importance of UN management reform efforts, (2) the lack of comprehensive implementation plans for some management reform proposals, (3) administrative policies and procedures that continue to complicate the process of implementing certain complex human resource initiatives, and (4) competing UN priorities, such as the proposal to reorganize the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, that limit the capacity of General Assembly members to address management reform issues.