



Highlights of [GAO-07-14](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Despite various reform efforts, significant inefficiencies in United Nations (UN) management operations persist. In September 2005, heads of UN member states approved a resolution that called for a series of reforms to strengthen the organization. As the largest financial contributor to the UN, the United States has a strong interest in the progress of UN reform initiatives.

GAO was asked to (1) identify and track the status of UN management reforms in five key areas and (2) identify factors that may affect the implementation of these reform initiatives. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed documents proposing UN management reform and interviewed U.S. and UN officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State and the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations work with member states to encourage the General Assembly and the Secretary-General to include cost estimates and expected time frames for implementation and completion for each reform as it is approved. GAO also recommends that the Secretary of State's annual *U.S. Participation in the United Nations* report to the Congress include a section on the status and progress of the major UN management reforms. The Department of State agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-14.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or melitot@gao.gov.

UNITED NATIONS

Management Reforms Progressing Slowly with Many Awaiting General Assembly Review

What GAO Found

Most of the UN management reforms in the five areas GAO examined—management operations of the Secretariat, oversight, ethical conduct, review of programs and activities, and human rights—are either awaiting General Assembly review or have been recently approved. In addition, many proposed or approved reforms do not have an implementation plan that establishes time frames and cost estimates. First, in July 2006, the General Assembly approved proposals to improve the management operations of the Secretariat, such as upgrading information technology systems and giving the Secretary-General some flexibility in spending authority. In addition, in fall 2006, the General Assembly will review other proposals, such as procurement and human resource reforms. Second, implementation of proposals to improve the UN's oversight capabilities, such as strengthening the capacity of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and establishing the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, are pending General Assembly review in fall 2006. Third, the UN established an ethics office with temporary staff in January 2006 that has developed an internal timetable for implementing key initiatives. However, it is too early to determine whether the office will be able to fully carry out its mandate. Fourth, UN member states agreed to complete a review of UN programs and activities in 2006, but progress has been slow and the results and time line for completion remain uncertain. Fifth, the General Assembly created a new Human Rights Council in April 2006, but significant concerns remain about the council's structure.

GAO identified several factors that may affect the UN's ability to fully implement management reforms. First, although all UN member states agree that UN management reforms are needed, disagreements about the overall implications of the reforms could significantly affect their progress. Most member states are concerned that some of the reforms could increase the authority of the Secretariat at the expense of the General Assembly, thus decreasing their influence over UN operations. Member states also disagree on some of the specifics of the reforms in areas such as the review of programs and activities and the role of the Deputy Secretary-General. Second, the general absence of an implementation plan for each reform that establishes time frames and cost estimates could affect the UN's ability to implement the reform initiatives. Without establishing deadlines or determining cost estimates, it is difficult to hold managers accountable for completing reform efforts and ensure that financing will be available when needed. Third, administrative guidance, such as staff regulations and rules that implement General Assembly resolutions, could complicate the process of implementing certain human resource reform proposals. For example, according to the Secretary-General, the General Assembly established a number of conditions for outsourcing that severely restrict the circumstances under which it can be contemplated.