

Highlights of [GAO-11-871](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The United States has long advocated for strong oversight of the United Nations (UN). In 2005, GAO raised long-standing concerns that the ability of the UN's Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) to carry out its mandate was constrained in scope and authority, and in 2006, GAO found that funding arrangements impeded OIOS's ability to operate independently. The U.S. Mission to the UN also expressed concern that OIOS's independence is limited in that it cannot make final hiring decisions for senior staff. In response to such concerns, the UN General Assembly in 2006 created an Independent Audit Advisory Committee (IAAC). GAO was asked to examine actions taken to address (1) impediments to OIOS's ability to provide independent oversight and (2) staffing issues that may have hindered its performance. GAO assessed OIOS's independence based on internationally recognized auditing standards, analyzed OIOS and other UN documents and data, and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State and the U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN work with the General Assembly and member states to address remaining impediments to OIOS's ability to provide independent oversight resulting from its relationships with certain UN funds and programs and other clients. State and OIOS generally concurred with GAO's findings and recommendation. However, State misinterpreted the report's discussion of OIOS's oversight authority. GAO added language to the report to clarify this discussion.

View [GAO-11-871](#) or key components. For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or melitot@gao.gov.

UN INTERNAL OVERSIGHT

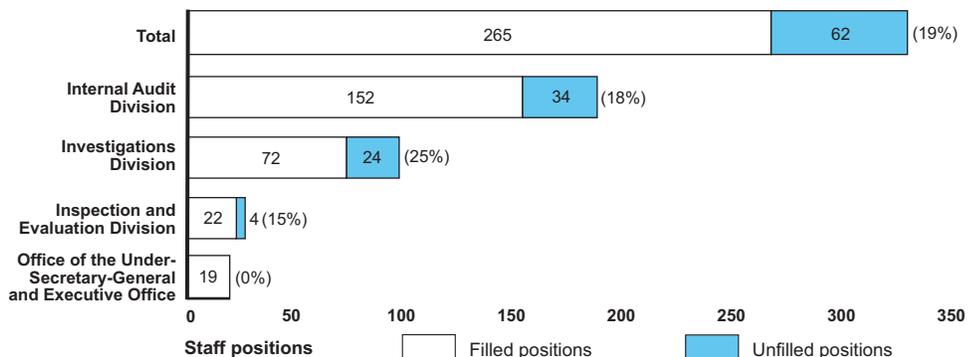
Progress Made on Independence and Staffing Issues, but Further Actions Are Needed

What GAO Found

The UN has taken worthwhile steps to enhance OIOS's independence, but certain UN funding and oversight arrangements continue to impede OIOS's ability to provide independent oversight. The General Assembly has supported OIOS's independence by creating the IAAC, which reviews OIOS's budgets and work plans for audits of the Secretariat and peacekeeping missions, and by recommending that OIOS base its planning and budget requests on risk in accordance with standards of the Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA). The General Assembly also clarified the role OIOS plays in internal oversight of funds and programs by adopting a resolution that reaffirmed the prerogatives of separately administered funds and programs to decide their own oversight mechanisms and relationship with OIOS. However, an independent review found that the arrangements for funding OIOS audits of those entities that choose to utilize its audit services do not meet IIA standards for independence. OIOS also remains constrained in its ability to issue consolidated audit reports for joint UN activities that include entities over which it does not have oversight authority, even when directed to do so by the General Assembly.

High vacancy rates for authorized positions have hindered OIOS's ability to provide sufficient oversight, but the UN and OIOS are taking steps to address this issue. As of July 2011, 19 percent of OIOS staff positions were unfilled (see figure below), and 30 percent were vacant for investigations of peacekeeping activities—the most challenging positions to fill. The UN's external auditor found that OIOS's staffing shortages hampered its Internal Audit Division's completion of its work plans. The UN and OIOS have made filling vacant positions a priority, and OIOS has hired 82 staff members since the start of the term of the new Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services in September 2010. The IAAC also expressed concern that vacancies at the senior management level would make it difficult for OIOS to accomplish its work. In August 2011, OIOS filled two director-level positions that had been vacant for more than a year. Further, the Under-Secretary-General has begun an initiative to strengthen OIOS's management and coordination and has requested an additional staff position for her front office. The Secretary-General has concurred with this request.

Percentage of Unfilled OIOS Staff Positions, Fiscal Biennium 2010-2011 (as of July 31, 2011)



Source: GAO analysis of OIOS data.