**UN investigators 'seriously compromised' by relationship to management bosses, report charges**

By George Russell

May 23, 2012

Fox News

[*http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/05/23/un-investigators-seriously-compromised-by-relationship-to-management-bosses/print#ixzz1vjWZPOGD*](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/05/23/un-investigators-seriously-compromised-by-relationship-to-management-bosses/print#ixzz1vjWZPOGD)

The  people who are paid to root out waste, fraud, corruption and wrongdoing in the sprawling United Nations are often not qualified to do their jobs, and are hampered by insufficient funding and potential conflicts of interest because the very people they are investigating control their careers and budgets, according to a report by U.N. experts on how the world organization investigates itself.

Very often, the U.N.’s internal investigators are part of the management structure they may be called on to probe, the report adds. Nor do most of the U.N.’s array of funds, programs, agencies and other organizations have any consistent means of making sure that investigations are followed up when wrongdoing is discovered.

The report’s stark conclusions amount to a renewed call for accountability by one of the few independent groups of investigators in the U.N., a small conclave of top-level experts based in Geneva that is known as the Joint Inspection Unit, or JIU.

The JIU inspectors are the only group of U.N. investigators expressly mandated to examine on a system-wide basis the effectiveness of the proliferating array of funds, agencies, programs and other organizations that make up the expanding U.N. universe, and even they have come under increasing pressure from U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon to toe an organizational line.

When queried by Fox News, JIU officials declined to comment at all on their report.

The 31-page document, a follow-up on several previous efforts over the past decade to examine the U.N.’s self-policing efforts, was intended to appear in 2011 -- and is labeled that way on its front page -- but the final version was not even created until February 2012.

The JIU inspectors examined a total of 21 U.N. organizations, by no means an inclusive list. One reason is that some of the U.N.’s most important programs are still considered, for investigation purposes, as part of the U.N. Secretariat. For example, there is no separate mention in the document of one of the most important and ambitious U.N. bureaucracies, which is bidding fiercely to become a bigger player in matters of “global environmental governance” in the years ahead.

That organization is the United Nations Environmental Program, or UNEP, which, according to various press reports, has the support of France, among other countries, to become a kind of environmental super-agency in the wake of the upcoming U.N. Rio + 20 global summit  on “sustainable development,” which begins June 21. The reason: UNEP makes use of investigators from the U.N. Secretariat instead.

“It seems to us sensible and a saving of taxpayers’ money to draw on the capabilities of the U.N. Secretariat rather than having or setting up a separate system,” a UNEP spokesman told Fox News.

Maybe not. A report three years ago by the Secretariat’s watchdog organization, the Office for Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), noted that under the arrangement, the United Nations Environmental Program had just one auditor and one assistant to inspect its operations and a number of multilateral agreements under UNEP's purview. The OIOS document estimated that it would take 17 years for the auditor to look over just the high-risk areas already identified in UNEP's work.

The same issue applied to the United Nations Human Settlements program, known as UN-Habitat, where OIOS estimated that it would take [the solo auditor 11 years to cover the high-risk areas in a $250 million Habitat budget.](http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,444885,00.html)

[Last year, a confidential examination of UNEP by OIOS, obtained by Fox News,  revealed that UNEP had repeatedly ignored its own financial rules,](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/06/10/un-internal-study-reveals-its-environment-program-is-administrative-mess/#ixzz1vcUsNQii) bypassed internal quality control agencies, didn’t know how its money is spent or even who it might be dealing with when it comes to hundreds of corporate, public and non-governmental partners that are key to fulfilling its mission.

What the JIU inspectors have to say about the U.N.’s other investigations efforts closely parallels what they recently said about the people who are entrusted to examine the U.N.’s books: [They are over-stretched and too much under the thumb](http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/01/14/auditors-qualified-stretched-say-inspectors/) of the managers they are likely to be investigating, who control investigation budgets, human resources and even the immediate careers of investigators who could be policing their decisions.

“As currently set up,” the JIU inspectors declare, “no oversight entity is free to decide on its budgetary requirements; oversight entities are subject to the same budget policies as any other entity within the Secretariats. The Inspectors believe this seriously compromises the independence of the oversight function, including investigations. “

And in some U.N. organizations, the report says, “no investigation can be opened in the absence of the executive head’s explicit approval or specific instruction.”

In other words, the people who may be held ultimately accountable for their organization’s failings get to decide whether those failings will be exposed or not.

Even when investigators get to do their jobs, the report says, “executive heads are able to make use of the investigation reports’ findings, conclusions or recommendations in the way they judge best, which, in a worst-case scenario, could include concealing evidence and/or burying the findings.”

And if the wrongdoing includes criminal activity, the report adds, the “executive heads” of the organizations get to decide whether local police or other authorities will even be involved.

When it comes to encouraging staffers to report wrongdoing, the inspectors indicate that U.N. organizations can also be less than forthcoming. In one unnamed case -- involving a “large” U.N. organization, the report says security cameras are installed “throughout its internal oversight office,” making a record of whoever comes inside.

 “This is a major deterrent to staff wishing to report and discuss wrongdoing with the investigators,” the report dryly states. “The Inspectors believe the cameras should be deactivated during business hours.”

Atop all that, there is something approaching systemic anarchy when it comes to investigative standards. Some smaller and more technical U.N. organizations, the report notes, don’t set aside any money for the investigation of wrongdoing, and have the option of “outsourcing” investigations -- though how is unspecified.

Both the JIU inspectors and U.N. staffers are concerned that such investigations conducted by “non-professional investigators and/or entities which are not independent but are part of management, can result in conflicts of interest, information not being handled properly, an uneven application of standards, and problems with due process, as well as cases being “dropped” or taking undue time to complete.”

The solutions that the JIU experts offer for most of the U.N.’s investigative problems are also not new:  greater autonomy from top management, including the right to pursue investigations without permission; more financial independence; and a direct reporting line to external oversight organizations -- independent auditing committees, for example -- as well as to bosses who might take a dislike to the investigators’ findings.

The experts, however, do have one fairly dramatic new idea on offer to deal with all the gaps, uneven standards, professional disparities and other  problems of the deeply fragmented system -- although, in typical U.N. fashion, it is less a solution than an invitation to a drawn-out bureaucratic process.

They call on Secretary General Ban to pull together an “inter-agency task force,” under the auspices of a U.N. body that includes the heads of 29 U.N. organizations to “develop options” for the creation of a single U.N. system-wide investigative unit, which would then be presented to the U.N. General Assembly and other legislative bodies for consideration.

The JIU suggests that the “options” be assembled by the end of 2013.  A spokesman for Ban’s office said that the secretary general wouldn’t be commenting on the idea until this fall.