General Assembly

Status of implementation of the information and communications technology strategy for the United Nations

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

I. Introduction

1.   The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the status of implementation of the information and communications technology strategy for the United Nations (A/74/353). The Committee also had before it the third annual progress report of the Board of Auditors on the implementation of the information and communications technology strategy (A/74/177). During its consideration of the above-mentioned reports, the Committee met representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 31 October 2019. The Committee also had an exchange with the Audit Operations Committee.

II. Background and context

2.   The Advisory Committee recalls that the information and communications technology (ICT) strategy, as endorsed by the General Assembly in section II of its resolution 69/262, is being implemented through 20 strategic projects as presented in annex I to the first progress report of the Secretary-General on the status of implementation of the information and communications technology strategy for the United Nations (A/70/364). The current report of the Secretary-General represents the fifth annual progress report on the implementation of the five-year ICT strategy. The Committee further recalls that, pursuant to Assembly resolution 70/238 B, in which the Assembly endorsed the recommendations of the Committee, the Board of Auditors conducts an annual audit of the implementation of the ICT strategy and submits an annual progress report. The present report reflects the Board's third annual audit (A/74/177). A summary of the timeline for the implementation of the ICT strategy is provided in the preambular sections of the Board's third progress report.

Please recycle

III. Third annual progress report of the Board of Auditors on the implementation of the information and communications technology strategy

3.   The Board of Auditors indicates that its third annual progress report (A/74/177) reflects the implementation of the ICT strategy in 2018, on the basis of an audit conducted from 18 February to 15 March 2019. The Board's findings reflect weaknesses in the implementation of the strategy in several areas, including: governance framework; policies and compliance; implementation of the strategic projects; Umoja mainstreaming; information security; disaster recovery management; application and website rationalization; the enterprise network operations centre; and the Unite service desk; and in defragmentation, including enterprise application centres and ICT units. The Advisory Committee discusses the Board's findings and recommendations in the relevant paragraphs of section IV below. **The Advisory Committee commends the Board of Auditors for the clarity and quality of its report, which provides valuable analysis and information on the implementation status of the ICT strategy.**

4.   The Board of Auditors provides an update on the implementation status of its recommendations (A/74/177, paras. 5 and 6 and annex I) up to 31 December 2018, noting that, of 39 pending recommendations of the Board up to the year ended 31 December 2018, 2 (5 per cent) have been fully implemented, 36 (92 per cent) are under implementation and 1 (3 per cent) has not been implemented. The Board notes that 95 per cent of its previous recommendations have yet to be implemented and that, of the 37 open recommendations, 12 were more than two years old. In its report, the Board sets out further recommendations on governance, compliance, Umoja mainstreaming, network segmentation and website rationalization, which had been flagged previously and for which the recommended measures have yet to be implemented. **The Advisory Committee notes with concern the low rate of implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and emphasizes the need for the full and timely implementation of the recommendations of the Board.**

IV. Report of the Secretary-General on the status of implementation of the information and communications technology strategy

5.   The fifth annual progress report of the Secretary-General provides information on: (a) the implementation status of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors; (b) the end state of the implementation of the ICT strategy; (c) management reform as it relates to ICT; (d) a new approach to governance; (e) key issues in the implementation of the ICT strategy; [1] and (f) an update on key initiatives; [2] and (h) global sourcing and global assets management.

6.   With regard to the end state, the fifth annual progress report of the Secretary-General provides a brief overview of the implementation of the ICT strategy over the

_____

[1] Including: compliance with the Secretary-General's bulletin on the Office of Information and Communications Technology; confidentiality of data contained in Umoja; information security management; the application management strategy; standardization and consolidation of legacy systems and websites; and cloud computing and acquisition of ICT products and services within the new supply chain management approach.

[2] Including: Umoja; enterprise applications; operational support; data management and data governance; information management; information security and data recovery; and innovation, including emerging technologies and partnerships.

five years of its implementation (A/74/353, paras. 9–23). The Secretary-General states that improvements have been made in: addressing the fragmentation of the ICT landscape, including the consolidation of the Information and Communications Technology Division of the former Department of Field Support into the Office of Information and Communications Technology; reducing the total number of applications; consolidating help desks and data centres; introducing cloud services; providing common datasets for use in dashboards; blocking cyberattacks; establishing an enterprise delivery framework; and advancing the innovation agenda. **The Advisory Committee notes the overall progress made in the implementation of the ICT strategy.**

A.   General comments and recommendations

7.   The Secretary-General states that his report constitutes the fifth and final progress report on the implementation of the ICT strategy and that it provides a comprehensive update of the status of key initiatives and commitments contained in the strategy, as well as of the implementation of the recommendations of the Board of Auditors (A/74/353, summary).

Final progress report on the implementation of the information and communications technology strategy

8.   The Advisory Committee notes that the time frame for the implementation of the ICT strategy is 2014–2020[3] and was informed that, in accordance with existing decisions, the ICT strategy would conclude in February 2020. **Given that the five-year implementation period of the ICT strategy has not yet been completed, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit for consideration at the main part of its seventy-fifth session a final report on the implementation of the current ICT strategy, taking into account the observations and recommendations in the present report.**

9.   Upon enquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the next ICT strategy would be subject to any decisions that the General Assembly might take following its consideration of the fifth progress report. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to include in his forthcoming final progress report on the implementation of the ICT strategy his proposals for the next ICT strategy for the United Nations, building on the results achieved, challenges, issues and lessons learned from the five-year implementation of the ICT strategy during the period 2014–2020.**

Implementation status of the information and communications technology strategy

10.   The Advisory Committee notes that, while the fifth annual progress report of the Secretary-General discusses a wide range of subjects that are addressed in the ICT strategy (see para. 5 above), the information provided is mostly of a general nature and is insufficient for the Committee to determine with any clarity the actual progress made towards completion of the implementation of the ICT strategy. The Committee further notes that the fifth annual progress report of the Secretary-General does not provide, as was the case in previous years, an overview of the implementation of the 20 ICT strategy projects, the key project modifications and a detailed update on the

_____

[3] The five-year time frame of 2013–2017 indicated in the strategic road map (A/69/517, annex I) was subsequently revised to 2014–2020, in line with the Secretary-General's second report on the status of implementation of the ICT strategy for the United Nations (A/71/400) (see A/74/177, third report of the Board of Auditors on progress in the implementation of the ICT strategy).

implementation status of the ongoing ICT strategy projects (see A/73/384, annex II). In addition, the Committee notes that, for some key projects, including the Unite Service Desk, application consolidation and website rationalization and enterprise network operations, the Board of Auditors notes that projects were designated as 100 per cent complete even though the project objectives had not been fulfilled. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to ensure that the final report on the implementation of the ICT strategy provides full and accurate information on the implementation status of the strategy, including details on the challenges faced and lessons learned, as well as an analysis of reasons for the successful or unsuccessful implementation of planned activities, including, for instance, information on any systemic issues and organizational arrangements affecting the implementation.**

Next steps

11.   The Advisory Committee recalls that, in its resolution 72/266 B, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit for consideration at its seventy-fifth session a report on the implementation of the management reform, including on the functioning of the new Office of Information and Communications Technology. The Committee is of the view that the upcoming milestone marking the end of the five-year implementation period of the ICT strategy and the full implementation of the new structure of the reorganized Office presents an opportunity for: (a) taking stock of the ICT landscape of the United Nations and the extent to which the needs of the Secretariat and Member States are being met; (b) conducting a preliminary analysis of the functioning and impact of the new structures, the ICT service delivery model, and of the dual reporting lines of the Office to the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Department of Operational Support; and (c) charting the future direction of ICT activities at the United Nations, which can include proposals for the subsequent period consisting of a new long-term ICT strategy and/or intermediate steps for addressing key challenges and outstanding issues.

12.   The Advisory Committee recalls that, in his previous report, the Secretary-General indicated that the Department of Field Support had issued its field technology framework, which sets the vision for the development of ICT in support of United Nations peace operations over the coming five years (2018–2023). The Committee emphasizes that the consolidation of the Information and Communications Technology Division of the former Department of Field Support into the Office of Information and Communications Technology as part of the Secretary-General's management reform represents only a first step in the reorganization process. It is also necessary to integrate the two entities at the working level, including through establishing common goals and strategies, adopting common ways of working and effectively reducing duplication and maximizing synergies. The Committee considers that it is necessary to ensure that all parts of the Secretariat are integrated into a common, unified ICT strategy framework to ensure the effective functioning of ICT governance, compliance and information security processes, as well as cost-effective and efficient use of resources. The Committee is of the view that the specificities of ICT requirements in the field can be addressed under such a unified ICT strategy framework. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to ensure that the field technology framework is integrated under a unified ICT strategy applicable to all parts of the Secretariat, including field missions, to ensure effective and efficient use of ICT resources.**

13.   As indicated in its previous report (A/73/759, para. 9), the Advisory Committee has frequently stressed the need to establish a clear record of the situation at the beginning and end of the implementation of major business transformation and reform

initiatives in order to determine the impact of the action taken.[4] While recalling that few data were available on individual ICT units at the beginning of the implementation of the ICT strategy, the Committee nevertheless considers that such a record should be established at the end of implementation, which will also serve as a baseline for future initiatives. **Accordingly, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to conduct an inventory to establish a baseline of: (a) all ICT expenditure by category of expenditure; (b) personnel-related resources, including posts, positions, temporary assistance, contractors and consultants; (c) non-personnel-related resources; and (d) the inventory of ICT asset holdings (tangible and non-tangible). The baseline should also include information on the ICT services provided, the applications developed and/or maintained and ongoing and planned ICT projects and initiatives (A/73/759, para. 9). The Committee further recalls that the Assembly, in its resolution 72/262 C, also endorsed the Committee's recommendation that, given the magnitude of resources expended on ICT annually, the Secretary-General should be requested to include in the budget and budget performance documents of each Secretariat entity information on its ICT expenditure and capacities (A/72/7/Add.51, paras. 37–38).**

B. Comments and recommendations on specific aspects of the information and communications technology strategy

1. Governance

14.   In its report (A/74/177, paras. 8–14), the Board of Auditors makes several observations and recommendations on governance, including: (a) the Information and Communication Technology Executive Committee,[5] which is expected to meet at least once a year and is expected to receive quarterly updates on projects, did not meet in 2018; (b) the Information and Communications Technology Board[6] did not prepare an annual report and met only twice in 2018 rather than every six weeks as prescribed in the Secretary-General's Bulletin on the Office of Information and Communications Technology (ST/SGB/2016/11). The Board notes that cooperation of and coordination with other stakeholders are critical to the implementation of a number of initiatives mandated in the ICT strategy, for example, defragmentation, application and website rationalization and disaster recovery management, and considers it important to have an operational ICT governance framework to review and steer the implementation of the ICT strategy. The Board recommends that the Administration ensure that the governance framework for the implementation of the ICT strategy be made operational and a new governance framework, if envisaged, be put in place immediately to strengthen the governance mechanism.

––––––––––––––––

[4] For example, A/69/610, paras. 22 and 23; A/70/7/Add.18, para. 14; and A/72/7/Add.51, para. 37.

[5] The Information and Communications Technology Executive Committee, chaired by the Under-Secretary-General for Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and composed of 13 senior managers at the Under-Secretary-General level, is the highest decision-making body in the Secretariat on ICT strategy and priorities and is mandated to ensure that ICT is central to, and delivers against, the business requirements and objectives of the United Nations.

[6] The Information and Communications Technology Board is responsible for ensuring coherent and coordinated global usage of ICT across departments and duty stations, in line with the objectives of the Secretariat and the general policy direction provided by the Information and Communications Technology Executive Committee. The Board is chaired by the Chief Information Technology Officer and comprises members at the D-1 and D-2 levels representing offices and departments at Headquarters, offices away from Headquarters, economic commissions and tribunals.

15. In response to the previous recommendations of the Board of Auditors, the Secretariat indicated that it had initiated an ICT governance review in the third quarter of 2018 to be delivered at the beginning of 2019, in line with the management reform, including delegation of authority and other changes. In his fifth annual progress report, the Secretary-General recalls that, in his report on shifting the management paradigm in the United Nations (A/72/492) he stated that the strategic, policy, governance and oversight role of the Chief Information Technology Officer would focus on the development of Secretariat-wide information and communications technology governance, strategy, policy and standards and effective enterprise data management to support executive decision-making, quality assurance and the monitoring of support and accountability mechanisms. The Secretary-General further states that the standardization of technology is an important means to effect technical control and strengthen governance. He also indicates that the current governance bodies are being consolidated into a single mechanism that would cover ICT in general and the oversight of enterprise systems that are no longer in the project implementation phase, as well as the technical aspects of making structured data available to relevant users in support of mandate delivery. The Secretary-General further indicates that the governance body would be co-chaired by the Department of Operational Support and the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, with both supported by the Office of Information and Communications Technology as the lead on technical aspects of applications and technology (see A/74/353, paras. 24–29).

16. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in its resolution 69/262, in which it endorsed the ICT strategy, the General Assembly stressed the need to harness the potential of ICT to support the work of the United Nations in the areas of peace and security, development, human rights and international law, and also underlined the importance of ICT in meeting the growing demands of the Organization as it becomes increasingly reliant on its ICT infrastructure. **The Advisory Committee emphasizes that any changes to the ICT governance framework must be presented to the General Assembly. The Committee further trusts that, in aligning the arrangements of the ICT governance framework, the Secretary-General will take into account the emphasis placed by the Assembly in its resolution 69/262 on the importance of effective ICT governance, leadership, coordination and collaboration within the Organization to avoid fragmentation and duplication (see para. 25 below).**

17. In its resolution 69/262, the General Assembly acknowledged the importance of the strong central leadership of the Chief Information Technology Officer for the overall direction and performance of ICT activities within the Organization and emphasized the need for appropriate delegation of authority and procedures for ensuring compliance with the revised ICT strategy guidelines. In its report, the Board of Auditors notes that the delegation of authority for ICT matters had not been formally established as at March 2019. It further notes that the global delegation of authority framework, released in January 2019, did not expressly include the delegation of authority for ICT matters (A/74/177, paras. 21–24). **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to establish and promulgate delegation of authority and related procedures for ICT matters without further delay, and to report on the action undertaken in his above-mentioned report on the management reform (see para. 11 above).**

2. Information and communications technology policy and compliance

18. With regard to ICT policy, the Board of Auditors notes that, as at February 2019: 42 ICT policies, including 22 technical procedures, had been issued; the ICT Policy

Committee had met eight times in 2018; the policies on the reuse and safe disposal of decommissioned ICT equipment and data management needed to be revised; and that no action had been taken towards the formulation of a policy on the outsourcing of ICT services (ibid., para. 16). With regard to compliance, the Board observes that reviews on the compliance of Regional Technology Centres on specific ICT policies had not been undertaken in 2018 and that the annual review and self-certification by departments and offices for policy compliance conducted in August 2018 was limited, focusing on only 2 policies (information security) out of the 42 currently in force, with only 5 out of 70 entities submitting completed self-certification forms (ibid., para. 18). **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide in his final progress report a review of the status of ICT policy compliance by Secretariat departments/offices, and to ensure that the matter is addressed in the ongoing revision of the Secretary-General's bulletin on the Office of Information and Communications Technology (ST/SGB/2016/11) to reflect management reform (see A/74/353, para. 30).**

3. Information security

19. The Board of Auditors identifies weaknesses in the implementation of the information security 10-point action plan project in the areas of: (a) network segmentation; (b) the classification of information assets; and (c) the mandatory implementation of information security controls for public websites:

(a) The Board notes that, in response to its previous report, the Secretariat had proposed network segmentation[7] as an alternative to the deployment of additional sensors for intrusion detection systems, but that segmentation had yet to be implemented throughout the Secretariat. As a result, access to network resources in parts of the Secretariat's network remained loosely controlled, allowing attackers to leverage control over a single compromised host to access additional internal targets;

(b) The Board notes that the classification of information assets has not been implemented comprehensively. Although the departments and offices were assigned the responsibility of classifying information on the basis of its sensitivity, there was no assurance that they classified all information in line with its security or sensitivity level. The Board indicates that the Information and Communications Technology Board had acknowledged the criticality of data classification in the context of the increasing number of security breaches that were being detected and reported. The Board further notes that it had been informed by the Office of Information and Communications Technology that it did not have the ability to verify the implementation of the classification of information assets, as that was the responsibility of business owners;

(c) The Board notes that the governance and compliance process and the mandatory implementation of information security controls for public websites (which is validated in part through three external vendors who conduct assessments on the basis of the methodology of the Office of Information and Communications Technology) can be bypassed and has led to, inter alia, the proliferation of non-compliant United Nations websites and increased ICT security risks and breaches. The Board also notes that, while there are multiple issues that have yet to be addressed regarding website rationalization, the project for public website rationalization was designated as being 100 per cent complete and that website consolidation would be undertaken as an ongoing operational activity within the Office from January 2019. The Board indicates that it was informed that website

---

[7] Network segmentation reduces the possibility of secondary compromises through a single compromised host and improves network security significantly.

governance and associated compliance controls had been established and that the Chief Information Technology Officer had informed the departmental heads of public websites of the requirements for maintaining the websites and of their obligation to register their websites in Unite applications.[8]

20.   The fifth annual progress report of the Secretary-General does not provide any information on progress made to address the above-mentioned weaknesses. The Advisory Committee recalls that, in its resolution 69/262 (sect. II, paras. 12, 16 and 18) the General Assembly underlined the importance of strong and accountable management of information security and recognized the need to ensure central control of information security and the Chief Information Technology Officer as the central authority for information security. Furthermore, under the management reform, entire organizational structures have been put in place for ensuring compliance and accountability, including in the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance and the Business Transformation and Accountability Division. **The Advisory Committee notes with deep concern that critical actions relating to information security have not yet been comprehensively implemented, or that the established governance and compliance processes are not adhered to and that effective mechanisms are not in place for monitoring and ensuring compliance with the existing guidelines and standards. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to adapt the relevant policies/ procedures and to update his bulletin on the Office of Information and Communications Technology (ST/SGB/2016/11) to strengthen the role of the Chief Information Technology Officer in accordance with Assembly resolution 69/262 (see above) and ensure compliance with and full implementation of the 10-point action plan on information security as a matter of priority.**

4.   Capital investment plan

21.   In its previous report, the Advisory Committee indicated that it had been informed that the Secretary-General would provide in his next annual progress report an assessment of the capital investment necessary for upgrading ageing systems throughout the Secretariat, including conference management systems. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that the Office of Information and Communications Technology had undertaken an analysis of the replacement of outdated equipment and systems, with a view to, inter alia: enhancing capabilities to meet current requirements and comply with industry standards; providing the services required to maintain and successfully operate those systems; enhancing physical safety and security; providing accessibility for persons with disabilities; and supporting environmentally sustainable operations. The Committee was further informed that the Controller had established a working group in September 2019 to review assets and determine the volume and timing of the investments and funding sources. The timing of the presentation of proposals would be determined on the basis of the outcome of the review. **The Advisory Committee trusts that the Secretary-General will provide the General Assembly at the time of its consideration of the present report with an update on the status of the development of the capital investment plan and timeline envisaged for its completion.**

22.   In this connection, the Advisory Committee recalls that, in response to General Assembly resolution 73/270 on the pattern of conferences, the Secretary General has issued a report containing the findings of a review of the deteriorating conditions and

_____

[8] The Advisory Committee was informed that Unite Applications, or Unite Apps, is a platform to collect information on applications throughout the Secretariat. This information is provided by the departments through their authorized focal points. Designated information technology focal points throughout the Secretariat have been instructed to update their website information and compliance in Unite Apps.

limited capacity of the conference facilities at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, as well as initial options for possible renovation and new construction works aimed at addressing the current situation (A/74/471). That report, which also discusses the status of the ageing conference servicing equipment, and the related report of the Committee (A/74/7/Add.22) are currently before the Assembly.

5. Umoja mainstreaming

23.   Information on the Umoja-related activities of the Office of Information and Communications Technology is provided in paragraphs 49 to 52 of the fifth annual progress report of the Secretary-General. It is indicated that: (a) the Unite Service Desk provides Tier 1 support to Umoja on a 24/7 basis; (b) the Office provides ongoing maintenance and support for application program interfaces for legacy applications and support to key extrabudgetary funds management dashboards; (c) Office database administrators were formally trained and embedded in the Umoja team to learn skills in in-memory data warehousing and other administration activities; (d) in collaboration with the Umoja team, and as part of Umoja Extension 2, the Office designed an integrated solution to replace various outdated stand-alone systems in support of the contingent-owned equipment management process and also designed an integrated solution to support the fundraising process; and (e) the Office team has been trained in various modules and business processes, achieving an expert level of knowledge.

24.   The Advisory Committee recalls that, in its report on the Secretary-General's eleventh progress report on progress in the implementation of Umoja, it recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to include in the proposed programme budget for 2021 a detailed plan for the mainstreaming of the Umoja team into the Secretariat to ensure a sustainable business model of the Umoja system (A/74/7/Add.17; see also Assembly resolution 73/279 A, sect. XVII, para. 16). **The Advisory Committee will revert to the question of the mainstreaming of Umoja at the time of its consideration of the proposed programme budget for 2021.**

6. Defragmentation

25.   In its resolution 69/262, the General Assembly acknowledged that the lack of effective governance and leadership in the area of ICT had resulted in a high level of duplication and fragmentation of ICT functions within the Secretariat and requested the Secretary-General to continue his efforts to reduce such fragmentation at all duty stations and field missions. Under the ICT strategy, defragmentation is being addressed through, inter alia, the continued harmonization of applications, with the enterprise application centres being responsible for the development of enterprise solutions that will increasingly replace multiple local legacy systems and allow their decommissioning, and the continued harmonization of ICT units (see A/72/7/Add.51).

26.   In its report, the Board of Auditors notes that 27 departments or offices still do not coordinate their ICT resources with the Office of Information and Communications Technology. Upon enquiry as to the reasons for this continued situation, the Advisory Committee was informed that ICT units within Secretariat entities have separate budgets, reporting lines and priorities, and that it remains a challenge to ensure that Secretariat departments/offices align their priorities and use of ICT resources with the ICT strategy. Furthermore, as long as ICT budgets remain fragmented, the lack of coordination will likely continue. The Committee was further informed that the introduction of delegation of authority for ICT will improve this situation as it will introduce strengthened monitoring and management of the authority delegated to heads of entity with regards to the ICT functional area. **While noting that the consolidation of the Information and Communications Technology Division of the former Department of Field Support into the Office of Information and**

Communications Technology under the management reform represents important progress towards the harmonization of ICT units, the Advisory Committee considers it essential that the revised Secretary-General's bulletin on the Office include provisions requiring all ICT units in the Secretariat to align their priorities and use of ICT resources with the ICT strategy as a matter of priority. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide details on the status of harmonization of ICT in his final progress report.

27.   The Advisory Committee further emphasizes the importance of ensuring that budgets and projects from all funding sources for all ICT initiatives and operations of the Secretariat are reviewed by the Office of Information and Communications Technology within existing governance structures before their submission to the Office of Programme Planning, Finance and Budget, as stipulated in the Secretary-General's bulletin on the Office (ST/SGB/2016/11, para. 2.2 (g)). The Committee recalls that, in its resolution 72/262 C, the General Assembly endorsed the Committee's recommendation (A/72/7/Add.51, para. 13) that all Secretariat departments and entities must fully comply with the ICT strategy of the United Nations and all provisions of the Secretary-General's bulletin on the organization of the Office (ST/SGB/2016/11). The Committee recommends that the Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide in his final progress report an update on progress achieved in ensuring the effective cooperation of all Secretariat entities in implementing the ICT strategy, as well as on compliance with the provisions of the Secretary-General's bulletin on the Office (ST/SGB/2016/11).

7.   Innovation

28.   In the area of innovation, the fifth annual progress report of the Secretary-General provides information on the leveraging of emerging technologies to build innovative tools and solutions and on developing partnerships to support the work of United Nations entities in advancing their mandates. For instance, the Office of Information and Communications Technology has set up United Nations Technology Innovation Labs, which function as a start-up environment and create a platform for collaborative problem-solving between United Nations resources and the private sector, academia and civil society, mainly for the benefit of Member States. In addition, the Office has developed tools and solutions using frontier technologies, including a platform for conversational artificial intelligence that allows human conversation as an interface to information technology systems. The Office has also created a Unite Ideas public engagement platform, which was adopted by the High-level Committee on Management as a standard crowdsourcing platform available to United Nations agencies funds and programmes, as well as to Member States, to post and solve challenges in innovative ways among individuals, academic groups and the private sector. **The Advisory Committee encourages the Secretary-General to continue to cooperate with Member States in the establishment of United Nations Technology Innovation Labs and the sharing of best practices. The Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide information on further developments in his final progress report.**

8.   Cooperation with United Nations system entities

29.   The Advisory Committee has frequently emphasized the importance of system-wide coordination and cooperation on ICT matters. **The Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to provide more information in his final progress report on ongoing initiatives and**

on cooperation and harmonization among United Nations system entities on ICT matters, as well as on current arrangements for cost sharing and cost recovery.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

30.   The action to be taken by the General Assembly is set out in paragraph 97 of the fifth annual progress report of the Secretary-General. **Subject to its observations and recommendations in the present report, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly take note of the report of the Secretary-General.**

————————