



Highlights of [GAO-04-339](#), a report to congressional requesters

# UNITED NATIONS

## Reforms Progressing, but Comprehensive Assessments Needed to Measure Impact

### Why GAO Did This Study

The U.N. Secretary General launched two reform agendas, in 1997 and 2002, to address the U.N.'s core management challenges—poor leadership of the Secretariat, duplication among its many offices and programs, and the lack of accountability for staff performance. In 2000, GAO reported that the Secretary General had reorganized the Secretariat's leadership and structure, but that the reforms were not yet complete. As the largest financial contributor to the United Nations, the United States has a strong interest in the completion of these reforms.

GAO was asked to assess the (1) overall status of the 1997 and 2002 reforms, (2) implementation of reforms in four key areas, and (3) potential challenges to reform.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State and the Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations work with other member states to encourage the Secretary General to (1) report regularly on the status and impact of reforms; (2) identify short- and long-term goals and establish target end dates for remaining reforms; and (3) conduct assessments of the resulting resource implications.

We received comments from the Department of State and the United Nations, both of which generally agreed with our conclusions and recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-339](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-339).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Joseph Christoff at (202) 512-8979 or [christoffj@gao.gov](mailto:christoffj@gao.gov).





### What GAO Found

As of December 2003, 60 percent of the 88 reform initiatives in the 1997 agenda and 38 percent of the 66 initiatives in the 2002 agenda were in place. In general, reforms under the Secretary General's authority were progressing more quickly than those requiring member states' approval. Since 1997, the Secretariat has implemented reforms to provide more unified leadership and coordination across departments and offices. However, the Secretariat has implemented other reforms, such as developing a written plan or establishing a new office, that are only the first step in achieving the Secretary General's overall goals.

Reforms in four key areas of U.N. operations are in various stages. First, the Secretariat has taken positive steps to strengthen its human capital management, but reforms in this area are ongoing and additional challenges remain. Second, the U.N. has begun to adopt results-oriented budgeting, but its monitoring and evaluation system does not measure program impact. Third, although the Secretariat reorganized its public information department, reforms of library management and publications are not fully in place. Fourth, the Secretariat's human rights office implemented the majority of its management reforms but does not have the authority to implement reforms outside the Secretariat.

U.N. reform faces several challenges. For example, the Secretariat does not conduct comprehensive assessments of the status and impact of U.N. reforms. In addition, the reform agendas lack clearly stated priorities, interim goals, and target dates for overall completion. Other challenges include resistance to change from program managers and possible resource constraints.

#### Status of Reforms in Four Key Areas of U.N. Operations

Area of Reform	Progress	Key Challenges
<b>Human Capital Management</b> 	Developed strategy for reforming human capital management Implemented new recruitment and placement system and an electronic performance appraisal system	Managing staff movement across organizations and geographic locations Decentralizing authority and accountability for personnel decisions
<b>Performance-Oriented Budgeting</b> 	Adopted a budget that reflects a results-based budgeting format	Identifying obsolete programs and shifting resources to priorities
<b>Public Information Activities</b> 	Streamlined Department of Public Information with focus on measuring results New internal committee aims to improve cost efficiency of library management	Officials' and member states' reluctance to identify duplicative publications
<b>Human Rights Program</b> 	Restructured human rights office with focus on improving financial, human capital, and program management	Heavy reliance on voluntary funding for core programs Secretary General's authority is limited to Secretariat reforms only

Sources: GAO; Nova Development and PhotoWire (clip art).