Summary of Activities of the UIA Secretariat

This report updates the report presented on the occasion of the UIA Council meeting (October 2004, Document #2) and additionally serves as a closing activity report for 2004 for review by the UIA Bureau on 21 January 2005. The previous Summary of Activities (26 May 2004) was distributed in preparation for the 10-11 June 2004 Council meeting (subsequently cancelled and replaced by an Informal Meeting).

In response to feedback, and in contrast with previous reports, the focus here is to minimize detail wherever possible. Given the circumstances however, the emphasis is on a level of frankness that seems necessary for healthy remedial action.

Financial situation

With the assistance of a monthly supplement from the UIA publisher, K G Saur Verlag, from July through December 2004, the cash flow crisis has been successfully avoided. From January 2005 through December 2005, the regular monthly editorial payments from Saur will however be reduced by a corresponding amount to repay the 2004 supplement (which effectively constitutes an interest free loan). Given that the December-January period is the time when subscriptions are renewed or cancelled, it is as yet too early to give any clear indication of the consequences of cost-cutting decisions made for the very tight UIA cash flow through 2005 in relation to the forecasts presented to the Council in October 2004.

As indicated to the UIA Council, it would be a grave error to forget the dimensions of the crisis experienced in June-July 2004. Furthermore, as indicated in earlier reports, there are a variety of warning signals regarding the medium-term viability of UIA income in the highly volatile, rapidly evolving information market -- in which many old and new players are actively positioning themselves, notably with the aid of new internet search facilities that reduce the need for the basic products and services provided by the UIA. It is also vital to recognize that the recovery process through 2005 is highly dependent on reducing costs and increasing revenues. Fundamentally the UIA faces the issue -- currently confronted by many bodies -- of the appropriate organization and strategy for the 21st century.

Office reorganization

The progressive consolidation of offices, agreed as a cost-cutting measure, has been completed with the abandonment of several offices in (40 rue Washington) and consolidation in 38 rue Washington. In order to achieve this, and sustain morale and image (with a view to centennial public relations), certain rooms have been refurbished (repainting and recarpeting) and have benefited from an extensive range of donated furniture. The process has involved discarding much unwanted/obsolete furniture, computer equipment, documents and stocks of marginal value. This process has been a healthy one for the general feel of the Secretariat and has been much welcomed by staff.

Publication production and services

The main UIA information products have been successfully produced and distributed under long-term contract with K G Saur Verlag (a subsidiary of Thomson Learning).
Yearbook of International Organizations (book)

- Yearbook (Vol 1: Profiles): Delivered to Saur on schedule (May 2004)
- Yearbook (Vol 2: Geographical): Delivered to Saur on schedule (June 2004)
- Yearbook (Vol 3: Subject): Delivered to Saur on schedule (July 2004)
- Yearbook (Vol 4: Bibliographical): Delivered to Saur ahead of schedule (July 2004)
- Yearbook (Vol 5: Statistics): Production terminated on schedule (November 2004), although considerable difficulties were subsequently experienced with the Saur printer due to poor communications regarding embedded fonts.

Yearbook of International Organizations (online): Successfully switched to the new MySQL/PHP database structure in September 2004 without affecting subscribers.

Yearbook of International Organizations (CD-Rom): Delivered on schedule in November 2004 from the new MySQL database structure, rather than from that used since 1995 for this purpose.

International Congress Calendar:

- **Paper**: The quarterly editions were successfully produced on schedule in 2004. As from 2005, this product will be delivered only online, with the option of e-mail or paper delivery of PDF pages on a quarterly basis. This approach had been agreed as one of the significant cost reduction measures in the recovery programme.

- **Online**: A major focus has been the switch to a new online facility and its integration with the organization profiles in the Yearbook database. This was successfully completed for demonstration to Associate Members in October 2004, who were offered free access through to the end of 2004.

Following discussion with Saur, it was agreed that UIA would continue to produce this product independently, but that Saur would act as non-exclusive distributor for the online service – which is integrated with the Yearbook Online facility. This means that users requiring access to both online services require separate subscriptions.

Transnational Associations: The quarterly editions were successfully produced on schedule in 2004. As from 2005, this product will be searchable online and delivered by e-mail (PDF) or paper on a quarterly basis. This approach had been agreed as one of the significant cost reduction measures in the recovery programme. Current issues are now integrated online with 50 years of back copies – notably as a contribution to the centenary process.

International Meeting Statistics 2003: This annual publication, primarily reserved for Associate Members, was produced on schedule in July 2004.

Who’s Who in International Organizations: The last edition (the fourth) was completed in 2003. Saur has been calling for a new edition, at least for inclusion on the Yearbook CD-Rom and in the online subscription with which it is currently bundled. The budget proposed is however minimal. The compromise is to do what can be done within the budget in the first half of 2005 by outsourcing the work to Helena Smalikova from Delphi (Poprad) under the direction of Nancy Carfrae.

It should be noted that the contracts with K G Saur Verlag, were “rolled over” for another three years from January 2005, reflecting the confidence of the publisher in the viability of UIA products and services. This work is now variously coordinated between Jacqueline Nebel, Nancy Carfrae, Joel Fischer and Tomáš Fülöpp.
Statistical programme

The UIA has for the past several years been operating a three-part statistical programme:

- Tables for the LSE/UCLA *Global Civil Society Yearbook*
- *International Meetings Statistics* (for Associate Members)
- Statistical Volume of *Yearbook of International Organizations*

The overlaps and timing of these initiatives have made for a coherent annual programme that was successfully completed in 2004 with the external assistance of Helena Smalikova (trained in 2003 and 2004 by Nadia McLaren who initiated the pattern in 2001). Unfortunately the first item will not feature in the 2005 programme, due to budget cuts by LSE/UCLA, raising concerns about the coherence of the programme as a whole given its dependence on a higher degree of expertise and familiarity with a multitude of source data tables.

Increasing proportions of this statistical information are now made available electronically, whether within online subscriptions, or as a free service.

Development of information services

A major upgrade of the in-house network server was successfully completed on 2 December 2004 -- with the exception of one unfortunately much-delayed facility to integrate UIA’s remote editors (Leuven; London; Poprad, Slovakia; and Louisville, USA) more effectively and reduce weekly data reconciliation costs. This feature should be completed in January 2005.

Online information services continue to be offered either freely or under subscription, as appropriate – with continuing effort to maximize access of international associations. A major focus has been the switch, ensured by Tomáš Fülöpp, to a MySQL/PHP database with:

- increase in the stability of the service (to remedy constraints and progressive obsolescence under the old DOS-based service) and to reduce dependencies for future maintenance,
- integration of the Calendar database as a source of new income,
- integration of the historical series of *Transnational Associations*,
- integration of the organizational logos database to enhance organization profiles,
- provision of automatic geographical maps for membership and event information,
- provision of statistics by country, city, date on-the-fly,
- addition of administrative interfaces with automatic user statistics (requested by Saur/Gale for marketing purposes).

Initially this has meant cessation of the network mapping service that has yet to be adapted to the new system. The changes now make it possible to implement remote online editing in 2005, notably in order to facilitate controlled access and input from profiled organizations – as a means of reducing the considerable postal costs to international organizations associated with paper questionnaires currently used to update the Yearbook.

This service was switched in September 2004 from an in-house facility to a remote (rack server) to improve performance and physical security. Unfortunately this facility was the subject of two major “denial of service attack” in December 2004. The necessary remedial action, with the aid of newly found external expertise, has resulted in a much more healthy configuration. However, these failures could not have come at a worse time in relation to end-
of-year subscription renewals to the new services. They raise important issues regarding server facilities in the potentially dangerous and “unfriendly” internet environment of the 21st century.

**UIA Meetings and Membership**

The Council meeting scheduled for June 2004 was of course postponed to enable the financial implications of the crisis to be reviewed. The Bureau met at that time to help clarify the steps to be taken. On the same occasion, an Informal Gathering was held with the participation of those Council members who had already made travel commitments and various people associated with the Secretariat. The meeting notably discussed both the strong possibility of liquidation of the UIA and the envisaged centennial celebration! A second such Informal Gathering was held in August. Documents relating to both have been circulated to Council members.

Following the meetings in June, there has in fact been very little comment by Full Members on the financial crisis and the possibilities of a successful recovery programme. Specific proposals for distinct recovery initiatives focused on fund-raising and new income have however been received from Gianni Tibaldi, Nadia McLaren and Jacques de Mévius in their capacity as Full Members, and in the light of their respective external contacts. These have been pursued, or are in process of further discussion.

On the basis of their professional skills, and as Full Members, group process suggestions addressing the UIA institutional malaise have been separately made by Jon Jenkins (author of a commissioned internal report on the UIA in 2001), Marilyn Mehlmann, Tim Casswell, and Peter Koenig, notably on the occasion of the June gathering. Their collective concern has however not yet evolved into a proposal for Council meetings. Those of Tim Casswell (coordinator of the Council working group on meeting methods) developed into the Informal Gathering in August (mentioned above), primarily for those most directly associated with the Secretariat.

Despite the financial crisis, the regular annual meeting of UIA Associate Members was held in Brussels (4-5 October 2004) and appropriately celebrated the many years of effort of Ghislaine de Coninck – with a song composed by Tim Casswell based on thematic phrases supplied by those present. The functions of Ghislaine de Coninck have now been taken over by Joel Fischer who is well-known as a speaker to many Associate Members.

The Council meeting (originally scheduled for June 2004) was held in October. A draft set of minutes was circulated on 15 November to Council members for comment -- with a view to their approval at the next Council meeting in 2005. No substantive comments have as yet been received. The Bureau meeting in January 2005 will no doubt provide a focus for any subsequent communications from Council members.

**Statutes**

As has been indicated, clarity from the Belgian Ministry of Justice regarding the required modifications to the statutes of all NGOs based in Belgium has been long in arriving. Finally, as indicated in separate communications, this information became available on 14 December 2004, notably with respect to the postponement of the deadline for conformity to 31 December 2005.

A first draft of the proposed modifications to the 1986 Statutes, in the light of recommendations by Andre de Schutter during the October Council meeting, has been
distributed for consideration by Council members. Mike Baker is working on items for a further revision.

A particular challenge for the UIA is the process whereby these changes are debated and approved by its statutory bodies in 2005 – and the timing of their meetings to meet the deadline in the light of expected government administrative delays. Concerns have been expressed as to whether the modifications made should be minimal or should seek to recognize the operating reality and resources of an international organization like the UIA in a 21st century information environment. In particular the possibility of electronic participation and voting will be under consideration.

**External relations and projects**

**Intergovernmental organizations:** The main event has been publication of the Cardoso Report (Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations) on October 2004. As requested by the Council, a letter was addressed to the UN Secretary-General on 4 November 2004 drawing attention to the role of the UIA in respect to information collection on international associations – which originally justified its consultative relationship in 1951. There is a reasonable possibility that the implementation of some recommendations by the UN will, whether inadvertently or not, result in some destabilization of UIA activity – notably with respect to database services on international organizations.

Through a contract with the EU TACIS project, the UIA provided a keynote speaker (Allan Howard) for the opening of the Development of Civil Society EuropeAid Institution Building Partnership Programme (Kiev, 14 October 2004), the second intervention of this nature on behalf of UIA.

**Centenary preparations:** Initial contacts with the King Baudoin Foundation with a view to setting up a special account capable of receiving tax free donations proved unsuccessful – despite the preliminary information. A revised proposal, in the light of further feedback, will be submitted in 2005. As decided by the Council in October 2004, funds must be available before commitments to any centennial projects are made. However other matters relating to the centennial celebrations (Council document #9.6), notably the date, have yet to be clarified.

**Glossary project:** Discussions with Europhil regarding the integration of the civil society glossary project into the range of UIA databases offered online, have reached a tentative positive conclusion (although the partners were not able to meet). However further action was delayed until January 2005 because of the existing commitments to UIA database development.

**External meetings:**

- **Celebration of 75th Anniversary of FIIG:** Unfortunately it was not possible for the UIA to be represented at this event.

- **General Assembly of Centro Italiano per le associazioni Internazionali (Montecatini):** Unfortunately it was not possible for the UIA to be represented at this event, nor to participate in an envisaged colloquium on that occasion, despite the convention governing the relation of the UIA with the Centro.

- **Maison des Associations Internationales (MAI):** The UIA was duly represented at the Administrative Council meeting on the modification of the statutes of this body -- of which the UIA is a founding member. The financial situation of the MAI, in which the UIA Secretariat is located, remains very precarious.
• **EFCT Summer School**: Once again, Joel Fischer was invited as a speaker at this event in Budapest.

• **FAIB**: The UIA was represented at several meetings held in relation to the change in the Belgian legislation relative to the statutes of international NGOs. The UIA continues to provide some computer facilities for FAIB.

**Dissemination of excess stocks**: As previously indicated, the UIA annually has access to excess stocks of its books as printed by Saur that could be of benefit to certain reference libraries. The issue is how to strike a balance between distribution of such volumes to interested bodies, without jeopardizing possible sales, without incurring the extensive transportation (and customs) costs or any associated administrative costs. Nadia McLaren has undertaken an initiative in response to this potential.

**Project development**: A series of active discussions have taken place with a number of potential partners with regard to new project possibilities. This follows from agreement during the June meetings, confirmed at the UIA Council meeting, that the possibility of attracting “investors” into new projects and partnerships should be explored. The key issue here is the nature of the interface with one, or more such investors:

- to protect the interests of all parties
- to make the project “attractive”, both to the UIA and to potential investors
- to appropriately distinguish between investors with primarily ethical as opposed to primarily commercial priorities, whether to include or to exclude the latter
- to ensure that contractual relationships with Saur are appropriately safeguarded
- to resist the tendency to reduce usage to simplistic research questions or any exploitation of addresses (that would erode confidence of organizations supplying the information)

The challenges are well illustrated by proposals made by others for collaboration with the UIA with regard to the conditions of use of its data. Typically even academic bodies consider it reasonable to request an extensive copy of the data, and unreasonable to be constrained in its use. Licensing use of data, and the associated “intellectual property”, is now an active topic for many in the emerging information society – especially when the constraints on the copying of data are being reduced. A variant of this approach also under consideration is the exploitation of UIA data under a suitable license – a form of outsourcing of project development.

**Strategy**

As has been previously noted, concerns have been expressed that the UIA lacks an explicit and effective strategy for the immediate future – despite many indicative proposals by the Secretariat. Appropriate clarification has been called for – notably to facilitate a coherent presentation to various parties for fund raising and other purposes.

It is however important to recall that the seeming lack of an explicit strategy ignores the degree to which UIA core operations are highly focused to sustain, on a long-term basis, a particular pattern of core revenue-generating services. This is strategy “by default” -- reflecting a pattern of decisions made over decades by the UIA’s statutory bodies. This is not a static strategy but one that has been obliged to evolve proactively in response to the evolution of the emerging knowledge society, its opportunities and constraints.

To assist in this debate, a number of documents were prepared for the Council meeting in October 2004. Of particular concern however is whether the UIA has the collective will and
resources to reform the existing structure in fundamental ways that would be an improvement on the present mode. Unfortunately Mike Baker, as coordinator of the Council working group on strategy, felt obliged to resign that role for lack of collective interest in this issue.

In considering any changes, it is important to recognize the strategic advantage that the UIA derives from the synergy between various information activities (organizations, meetings, biographies, problems, etc) as compared to other bodies which specialize in one or the other, often in a less comprehensive manner. It could be asserted that the UIA’s survival depends on these synergy effects.

Failure over recent years to address and resolve differences concerning the future UIA strategy has had, and continues to have, a cumulative effect that is undermining the capacity to engage with potential partners and act coherently in fulfilment of its potential in the emerging knowledge society. This “negative synergy” is extremely disempowering for those inspired by that potential.

This is seen most concretely in the challenge of producing a presentation brochure, notably to attract investors. Several initiatives by Council members (notably Marilyn Mehlmann and Peter Mettler), and on the part of the Secretariat (notably by Nancy Carfrae), have not yet resolved issues relating to the content of a brochure. The October Council meeting encouraged members to select and assemble texts for any such document according to need. However, without resolving the UIA’s “identity crisis” – common to many bodies entering the information society of the 21st century -- it is difficult for any professional marketing approach to articulate a coherent profile or determine to whom it should be addressed. It is for this reason that the Secretariat has stressed marketing of UIA information products and services through its website – notably to benefit from the worldwide visibility it offers.

Research

The extent and nature of UIA research was a theme reviewed during the October Council meeting (Doc #5). At this stage research has several points of focus: documentation and classification (a preoccupation dating back to its foundation); statistics (as valued by the academic community and meetings industry); and bibliographic (as valued by the academic community).

One consequence of the failure to resolve strategic dilemmas, and the role of the UIA in the wider pattern of international initiatives, has been the inability to take any position in relation to the dramatic challenges of the times – and their profound implications for assumptions about the future of the rule of law. Any critical research perspective is consequently left to those who benefit from the more basic research undertaken by the UIA, or to UIA collaborators working outside the UIA framework.

Human resources

As a whole, 2004 has been an exceptionally difficult period for those associated directly with the Secretariat. Briefly stated this has involved adjustments to retirement of key long-term personnel (Genevieve Deville, Ghislaine de Coninck), illnesses and their consequences (André Onkelinx, Anthony Judge, Cecile Denet), relocation (Joel Fischer), redistribution of roles, cost-cutting terminations (Paul Ghils, Nicole Maes), necessary new engagements and training (Helena Smalikova, Christine Chantrain, Leslie Selvais). Ensuring normal operations in a period of crisis has been rendered especially difficult because of the shifting availability of human resources, notably over the summer holiday period.
It is appropriate to note the vital role of non-staff members in sustaining the viability of UIA programmes. Jacqueline Nebel provides continuing guidance on the Yearbook, despite her status as an independent retiree. Joel Fischer has converted to an independent status working from the USA (on the Yearbook, Associate Members, some system maintenance, and non-standard inquiry processing). As an independent consultant, the transitional assistance during 2004 of Nadia McLaren with respect to UIA financial reporting, statistics and online development of the Calendar has been most valuable. Consolidation of the role of Helena Smalikova working from Slovakia will hopefully safeguard the statistical programme. Christian Sylvestre continues to provide assistance each year in the final production of the CD-Rom version of the Yearbook.

As agreed by the Bureau in June 2004, Anthony Judge has been performing the role of Secretary-General ad interim in anticipation of the election of a new Secretary-General, should André Onkelinx formally resign. Cecile Denet has successfully taken over the functions of Geneviève Devillé as Assistant Secretary-General responsible for administrative and financial questions.

The positive support of staff and non-staff through the recent months has been a significant factor in the healthy response to the financial crisis – especially given the recognized need to sacrifice an accepted end of year bonus. The role of Tim Casswell in addressing the issue of staff commitment and expertise in a series of encounters has been significant and much appreciated. It has resulted in a more regular series of staff gatherings – themselves valued.

Core Secretariat operations are indeed carried out satisfactorily – however under-staffed and under-resourced by other standards. It should however be emphasized, as has been stated in earlier reports, that staff levels and competencies are basically inadequate for the range of operations that have to be undertaken beyond those core tasks – especially at current salary levels. Although healthy, Secretariat operations are vulnerable and fragile -- and with only very limited skills backup in the event of absence (for whatever reason).

Whilst the question of human resources is normally treated separately from statutory and financial reporting, it is vital to recognize the extent to which functioning of the UIA has been, and continues to be, dependent on an unusual degree of goodwill, whether on the part of staff, Full Members, or others. An extensive analysis has been made of this dimension, with a view to reflecting some aspects in the balance sheet. That analysis concluded:

“… the current UIA malaise -- that has so long inhibited emergence of collective purpose, a sense of identity, or more fruitful strategic responses -- derives from misunderstandings, assumptions and exploitation relating to unrecognised dependency on goodwill in every aspect of the UIA undertaking”.

As remarked by one Council member with considerable experience in management of corporations and nonprofit bodies, the UIA has benefited from considerable goodwill in support of a now outdated vision, but has as yet proven unable to articulate a new vision appropriate to the 21st century -- consequently the commitment to its initiatives by all concerned is now in decline, despite the continuing success of its products.

As differently recognized by the well-informed and others, the UIA has great potential in the 21st century. However, the processes for identifying and developing it are at present inadequate to the challenge.

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