

**Informal briefing by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources
Management, Ms. Jan Beagle
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Although this is not technically an "HR year" in the Fifth Committee, human resources is an on-going, essential management aspect of the Organization. This continuing focus reflects the fact that staff are indeed the Organization's major asset, and this is not only a management issue – the way we manage this asset touches every individual serving in the Organization in a very personal and distinct way. It is for these reasons that the reform effort, spanning from recruitment to the way we dispense justice, is a process that needs ongoing attention.

The 2005 World Summit requested the Secretary-General to make proposals to the Assembly on the conditions and measures necessary for him to carry out his managerial responsibilities effectively, including in the area of human resources. In response, the Secretary-General presented a new human resources framework in his report "Investing in People". This comprehensive package of reforms includes, amongst others, proposals on recruitment, mobility, staff development and career development, contractual arrangements and harmonized conditions of service.

In order to develop this new human resources framework, we had extensive discussions with managers and staff throughout the Organization – through electronic means, on-site visits, and ultimately in the Staff Management Coordination Committee (SMCC). We also consulted with organizations of system at the interagency level, and benchmarked against global best practice. The result is a human resources framework which builds on successful innovations from the past, and aims at strengthening current and future human capital, and at aligning the human resources framework to the evolving needs of the Organization. The main policy shift is an integrated approach to human resources management throughout the Secretariat, to ensure that operational needs are met, while preserving organizational core values and ensuring consistency in application of standards, policies and procedures.

The Secretariat of today faces new realities - over half of our civilian staff serve in the field, working in a wide range of activities including peacekeeping, humanitarian emergencies, human rights, electoral assistance, development, and the battle against drugs and crime. In 1949, we had 1,500 staff, 1,000 of whom were in New York. In 2007, we have over 36,000 civilian staff. Of these, about 30 per cent are in our four headquarters duty stations (New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi), 7 per cent are in our regional commissions, 5 percent in Tribunals and over 50 per cent serve in field locations. About 70% of our staff are locally recruited and 29% are international professionals.

Contrary to the view of some that the majority of our staff are tenured bureaucrats with permanent contracts, only some 12% of our workforce in fact have permanent contracts. The overwhelming majority are on fixed term or limited duration contracts. The average age of our staff is 41.9 years – not very old for a knowledge-based organization.

What was formerly a stable, largely headquarters based parliamentary-serving organization, has become an increasingly operational organization with complex, interdisciplinary mandates. In this changing context, the Organization's human resources structures must be adapted to attract and retain high quality

personnel, facilitate rapid deployment and mobility, provide for satisfying career development and adequately compensate staff for serving in difficult and hardship conditions. In this environment we need staff who are versatile and multi-skilled, and have the experience and competencies to work in and manage complex integrated operations. We need people who understand field operations and headquarters functions. We need staff who are continually upgrading their skills and are able to work in often unpredictable and rapidly changing situations. We need to be able to manage an integrated workforce and to deploy staff across locations in accordance with operational needs.

We are not the only ones looking for these people. Some of you may have seen a recent cover story in the Economist on "The search for talent – why is it getting harder to find". That article said that talent is the world's most valuable commodity and in short supply. The retirement of the baby boomers means that a large number of experienced workers are leaving the workforce at a time when there are an increasing number of jobs globally that call for a combination of complex skills and competencies. Many organizations are responding actively to this challenge - last year some 2300 firms adopted some form of talent management technology. Investment in learning has increased significantly in both the public and private sectors. In the Secretariat, over recent biennia there has been a modest, but steady increase in the regular training budget. The Secretary-General is emphasizing the importance of training, especially in the context of skill upgrading and mobility but additional resources are necessary as the current training budget, at less than 1% of staff costs, falls well short of meeting organizational needs.

Retirement rates will also have a significant impact on the Organization in the coming years. In the next 5 years, over 15% of staff with contracts of one year or longer will retire from the Secretariat. At the P-5 level, 26% of staff will retire and over 40% at the director level. This offers a wonderful opportunity to bring in new skills and perspectives, and to give career development to younger people – but also a considerable challenge in succession planning, maintaining organizational capacity and knowledge management.

It is in this reality that we will be operating in the coming years. We need to make progress in all areas of the human resources framework including, strategic workforce planning, proactive and targeted recruitment, with improved geographical distribution and gender balance, simplification of contracts, harmonization of conditions of service, strengthened measures to support mobility, organizational learning and staff development, as well as putting in place a new internal justice system.

Over the past few years, significant progress has been made in adapting the human resource framework to meet the strategic and operational needs, including the introduction of an organizational competency model with core values and competencies, a system of workforce planning, an organizational mobility policy and strengthened learning and staff development programmes. Most recently, in its resolution 61/244, the General Assembly approved, either partially or in full, some important reform proposals, such as the provision of additional resources for HRIT and some additional funds for training. It also set the agenda for further discussion on a number of critical issues which were to take place at the second resumed sixty-first session.

At this session, you have before you a number of human resources reports. Some of them are routine annual reports; the others are responding to the specific GA requests and are technical in nature. I would like to focus on some critical aspects of the human resources reform yet to be realized which continue to be priorities for the Secretary-General.

Streamlining of contractual arrangements has been under discussion for several years now and it was an integral part of the proposal contained in the report "Investing in People". This critical part of the management reform envisages an introduction of a simplified regime of contracts under one set of staff rules with three durations: temporary, fixed-term and continuing.

As requested by the Assembly in its resolution 61/244, the Secretary-General has addressed the issues raised by the ACABQ in its report A/61/537, and presented a detailed road map on implementation of the proposal on contractual arrangements, including on eligibility criteria.

Following the observations issued by the ICSC on the Secretary-General's proposals (A/61/30/Add.1), the Secretary-General noted in his report A/61/857 that these observations required more staff consultation. SMCC-XXVIII met from 25 June to 4 July 2007 and made recommendations which were accepted by the Secretary-General. The report A/62/274 reflects the agreements made in SMCC. It stresses that the streamlining of contractual arrangements, within the overall ICSC framework, is critical if we are to build an integrated Secretariat that meets operational needs, to promote equity and transparency and to make contractual arrangements more transparent and easier to administer. This, in turn, will strengthen our ability to recruit and retain staff which is increasingly becoming a challenge, particularly in the field.

Another key element of the Secretary-General's human resources reform is the proposal for harmonization of conditions of service, on which further details are elaborated in report A/61/861. This provides a comprehensive account of the Secretary-General's proposal to improve conditions of service in the field to meet the needs of an increasingly field-based Organization and addresses the observations of the International Civil Service Commission in this area. The Secretary-Generals' proposals on harmonization of conditions of service are in line with the recommendations of the ICSC, and aim to remedy the existing significant differences between the conditions of service of the Secretariat staff in the field and staff of Funds and Programmes in the same locations.

In response to General Assembly resolution 61/244, the Secretary-General also provided additional information on Civilian Career Peacekeepers (A/61/850). The proposal to establish a framework of 2,500 career positions in United Nations peace operations represents a critical step in professionalizing the staff serving in United Nations peace operations, and, thereby, in professionalizing how the United Nations meets the exacting challenges set for it by the Member States in the preservation of international peace and security.

These proposals, together with the Secretary-General's commitment to continuous learning, represent an important step towards more effective management of the Organization's global workforce. We recognize that such fundamental change may be introduced gradually. The streamlining of contractual arrangements is an essential underpinning of change. This proposal requires relatively limited resources (\$23.7

million per annum: RB \$3.8 million, PK budget \$19.9 million), but its approval would have a far-reaching impact on the Organization. It would strengthen its ability to recruit and retain staff, ensure equity and transparency in treatment of staff, and simplify administration. It would also provide the basis for harmonization of conditions of service for staff in the field, as we seek to address the challenges in recruiting, retaining and developing staff.

Under the guidance of member states and this Committee in particular, we have made a significant progress in realizing the vision laid out in "Investing in People". The momentum gained last year should be maintained. We look forward to a constructive discussion in order to achieve our common goal of strengthening the Organization by investing in its people.