



Center for UN REFORM Education

Promoting Discussion of Ways to Improve the United Nations System

Fifth Committee Report No. 6 November 21st – December 1st

From November 21st to December 1st the Fifth Committee met for general discussions on the Capital Master Plan, the Pattern of Conferences, the Secretary General's Residency, the UN Pension System and the budget of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea. Informal consultations continued on scale of assessments, programme budget, United Nations pension system, procurement reform and human resources reform among others.

The following is a summary of issues raised with respect to human resources management reform and procurement reform.

Human Resources Management Reform

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS

On Thursday 30 November, 2006 Member States began discussions on a draft resolution on the reform of Human Resources Management at the UN. At the Informal Consultations, chaired by Mr. Morteza Mirmohammad of the Islamic Republic of Iran, staff from the Secretariat's Office of Human Resources and of Peacekeeping Operations were present to assist Member States during the debate.

Here is a summary of some of the issues raised during the discussions:

Increased participation of Staff Representatives

The G77 and China as well as Japan, proposed that staff representatives be involved in the consultation process. In particular, The G77 expressed serious concerns over the fact that staff representatives had not been invited to discussions with Member States at the Informal Consultations level and suggested that this should be arranged. The G77 also wondered whether this lack of participation had to do with the lack of trust in the process and what measures had been taken to date to favor participation.

The EU agreed, in principle, to listen to staff representatives, but suggested that established procedures should be followed. Thus, staff representatives should not be invited to Informal Consultations, but listened to in a different forum.

The G77 disagreed that inviting staff representatives to Informal Consultations was against the established procedures, and mentioned that when such procedures were established (during the 35th session of the GA), Member States had not even begun the practice to conduct Informal, or Informal 'Informal' Consultations. The Group stated that they do not wish to block negotiations on this point but nevertheless expressed their determination to be given the opportunity to listen to staff representatives.

Minimizing Professional Job Turnover

A proposal was introduced by the G77 and China with the scope to minimize the excessive instances of job turnover at the UN, but The US and the EU expressed serious concerns that such a proposal might infringe with a "healthy turnover" of personnel, which is a characteristic of active organizations. The US was willing to work with the G77 to try and work out a more acceptable proposal but stated that it will be very difficult for them to agree on such a concept.

More Active Role of Central Review Bodies in the Selection of Candidates

The G77 and China proposed that terms of reference of Central Review Bodies be amended to make them more participative to the process of selecting candidates so that they might also contribute to the reaching of geographical targets (and be held accountable for the lack thereof). With respect to this proposal, the US stated that amending the terms of reference of the CRB was not amongst the proposals for reform since they seem to work effectively. The EU added that the responsibility to meet the targets lies with the Secretariat and should

not be given to the CRB as well. Member States should instead, support the OHRM proposal of enforcing management accountability in reaching geographical targets.

Merit as Principal Factor in the Selection of Staff

With respect to the proposal aimed at strengthening the application of merit as a main factor in the selection of staff, put forward by CANZ, the G77 and China stressed that, as per UN Charter, merit and geographical representation are the two most important factors in the selection of staff and should stand at the same level. Also, such a proposal would require an amendment of the Charter and the Group will not accept it.

More Proactive Outreach

In order to increase awareness of job opportunities with a view to promoting more balanced geographical representation, the G77 and China proposed that the UN DPI, UN information centers, and country offices engage in more proactive and extensive outreach. The US is of the opinion that such a proposal is likely to involve additional resources and thus would not approve it. The EU supports the proposal but would insist that Member States are also involved in the outreach effort so that not all of the costs fall on the UN.

Rosters

Member States discussed, with the Secretariat, a few proposals put forward by Japan aimed at ensuring that existing rosters for recruitment are used more and exhausted before candidates from pre-screened rosters are selected. The Secretariat explained to Member States that, currently, candidates are being selected from the existing rosters but the request to exhaust the existing rosters before putting in place the new system of pre-screened rosters is far-fetched. OHRM has suggested creating the pre-screened rosters in order to help change the lack of functionality of the existing system. Member States all agreed that in modifying the staff selection process it should be ensured that external and internal candidates are treated fairly and that preference be given to qualified candidates from underrepresented/unrepresented countries.

With respect to Human Resources Management Reform some of the Member States proposals include:

G77 & China

The Group of 77 and China proposed that the SG allocate the resources for training in an equitable manner throughout the system, including duty stations and regional commissions. The Group also suggested that the SG guarantee proper functioning of the central review bodies be ensured, and to amend their terms of reference to ensure their substantive role in the selection of candidates. With respect to geographical distribution, the Group also requested that the SG develop and implement more equitable recruitment targets, timeframes for meeting these targets and to institute accountability measures to ensure rapid progress in achieving this objective, and report to the GA in this regard on an annual basis starting from the 62nd session of the GA. Furthermore, the G-77 and China asked that the SG present proposals aimed at enforcing plans of action in human resources, and establishing punitive measures for programme managers who deliberately and systematically do not comply with mandates on human resources.

The Group also requested that the Secretary General report on clear parameters on mobility and ways to protect the rights of staff as well as concrete measures to recruit and appoint nationals from developing countries at senior levels. Furthermore, the Group proposed that senior positions at Under-Secretary-General and Assistant-Secretary-General levels should rotate between developed countries and developing countries and must reflect as wide a geographical basis as possible within each Department, and that whenever one of the above is a national of a developed country at least one of the others should come from a developing country. Finally, the G-77 and China suggested that an advisory panel be established to monitor the implementation of the principle of equitable geographical representation in the Secretariat and that equitable representation from developing countries must be an integral part of the gender parity policy of the Organization.

CANZ

CANZ proposed, *inter alia*, verifiable measures to strengthen the application of merit as the principle factor in staff selection be developed, in accordance with the provisions of Article 101, paragraph 3 of the UN Charter. CANZ also proposed that the Secretariat ensure that all HR reforms are accompanied, wherever possible, by specific and measurable benchmarks and requests that progress be monitored, reviewed, and reported to the GA at its 63rd session. Furthermore, CANZ asked the Secretary General to report on the progress achieved, and on further practical steps that are necessary to improve the representation of women in the Secretariat. Finally,

CANZ endorsed the proposal of the SG to provide for peacekeeping staffing on an on-going basis, enhance professionalism, and to enhance the ability of the UN to respond quickly to peacekeeping needs by designating a cadre of continuing civilian positions from within existing capacity.

Japan

Japan proposed, inter alia, that the Secretary General stimulate heads of departments to greater efforts to attain the goal of equitable geographical distribution in the Secretariat through proper job evaluations and sanctions. It also requested that the Secretary General promote the utilization of existing rosters for recruitment before launching the proposed pre-screened roster. Furthermore, Japan proposed that the Secretary General use of the special roster for posts at the P-4 and P-5 levels and be authorized to continue, with a view to improving the geographical representation of unrepresented and underrepresented Member States until these are within their desirable ranges.

The European Union

The European Union proposed that the Secretary General continue his efforts to reduce the period required to fill vacancies, ensure the expeditious placement in appropriate posts of as many National Competitive Examination candidates as feasible, as well as significantly reduce the time needed for a successful candidate to complete a national competitive examination cycle. The EU also stressed that the Secretariat greatly increase efforts to attain the goal of gender parity in the Secretariat and establish a system of responsibilities to enforce accountability for those departments that consistently fail to meet gender distribution targets. To this end, the EU asked the SG to undertake measures towards the goal of 50/50 gender distribution, and to submit proposals to improve gender representation, and to strengthen his efforts to achieve greater transparency. The European Union proposed that the reduction in the time required for advertising a specific vacancy from 60 to 30 days be authorized. The EU also proposed that the use of the special roster of candidates from unrepresented and underrepresented Member States for a number of posts at P4/P5 levels be continued until these are within the desirable ranges. Finally, the European Union supports the creation of an additional standing capacity of established positions in key occupational groups required to support the UN peace operations and requests a report on its implementation at the Fifth Committee resumed session.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation proposed that, in order to ensure the transparency of the recruitment process, all specific vacancy announcements shall continue to be advertised. It also suggested that recruitment to the Professional category of staff from the General Service or related categories shall continue to be made through national competitive examinations within the limits established by the GA.

Procurement Reform

INFORMAL CONSULTATIONS

On Monday, November 27th, the Fifth Committee continued consultations on the subject of Procurement Reform at the United Nations. Personnel from the Secretariat's Office of Procurement Services and from the ACABQ were present to reply to questions from Member States. Q&A included:

Are there currently any vacancies at the procurement services office? How does the recruitment process work? Will the current vacancies be paid with the regular budget? Who will be selected, will geographical representation be taken into account?

Secretariat: Eleven new posts have been established for procurement. The SG suggested the creation of six additional posts. All positions would fall under the category of temporary contracts. Only once candidates have assumed their positions, will future opportunities for employment could be made available. The additional posts will allow us to increase our procurement capacity. A position at P4 level will help with functionality and reporting to Member States and we will appoint IT specialists as well.

The GA should oversee plans on the recruitment of new posts at procurement and it should be taken into consideration that there will be financial implications such as professional liability and insurance of staff. We would like to be able to see some statistics on how long it takes for vendors to complete an online registration

with the UN. Also, we are wondering why information of the companies that have registered are not more easily available, in terms of rewards of contracts for example, such information would be useful both to other vendors as well as to Member States. We are under the impression that information is no longer being updated and therefore progress is being delayed.

Secretariat: Of course the approval of the General Assembly is needed with regards to management issues. There are different types of accountability for responsibility with respect to the financial implications regarding liabilities and associated costs of procurement officers. Concerning the information with regards to registered vendors, the [UN Global Marketplace](#) should be the only portal for registration. From an operational point of view, any improvement and progress of the UN Global Marketplace is desirable and all requirements vendors are subject to should be taken into account and included in the system. The registration is supposed to enable vendor trust, thus stricter and more coherent criteria for registration are needed. As far as the problem with the updating of the information, this is due to lack of sufficient IT support. Vacancies of needed personnel will hopefully be filled by Spring of next year. Also, problems arise because we are working on a different platform.

Member States asked the Chairman of ACABQ to comment on the IT system.

ACABQ: Regarding procurement, we have noticed that there is a gap of attainable information between the orders made and what is ultimately received and paid for by the organization. This gap infringes on our ability to effectively monitor the process. In addition, the registration process and analysis of prices should be revisited. Also, as mentioned by the Secretariat, there are problems with respect to the fact that Mercury, the software platform used for procurement, is not compatible with IMS (integrated management system). One of the ways to solve these problems would include upgrading the current Mercury system to make it compatible with IMS, but this will require additional resources. Otherwise, we should wait for the DRP software (disaster recovery planning) upgrading and this should allow for the two systems to communicate.

Why did it take so long for the ACABQ report on procurement practices to be issued?

ACABQ: The report takes a long time because of the problem regarding jurisdiction of certain issues should be addressed: international organizations? Member States? The General Assembly? The SG has said that many issues fall under the jurisdiction of the authority of inter-governmental bodies but no empirical data in this respect is currently available. By the end of the week, the bureau should have received all the information needed but there will be a few more issues that the bureau needs to address.

MS also requested to be provided information on technical issues such as posts and supports accounts, in particular with regards to what actions should be taken by the GA in that respect.

The ACABQ replied that the posts that the GA is able to create at this stage would be up to a one-year contract base. When the posts are created, Member States could decide to extend the contracts if they find it appropriate to do so.

What can we expect from these reforms? For example what can we expect from better external evaluations? What will be the benefits to the people using procurement facilities?

Secretariat: The aim is that of trying to establish a stronger full procurement principle and internal controls. The UN needs a procurement function that is effective.

Is there a correlation between the business seminars [the UN system regularly organizes business seminars which include visits to select industries] and vendor registration?

Secretariat: There is no direct correlation between the registration process and the business seminars.

General Discussion

[DPI: Budget Committee approves Texts on Pattern of Conferences. Renovation of the Secretary General's Residence](#) November 22, 2006

[DPI: Budget Committee takes up financing for 1.88 billion Capital Master Plan](#), November 30, 2006

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