Center for UN REFORM Education

Promoting Discussion of Ways to Improve the United Nations System

FIFTH COMMITTEE REPORT

Week of 13-17 November, 2006

During the week of November 13-17, 2006 the Fifth Committee held meetings, inter alia, on the revised budget for the Cote D'Ivoire Mission, the financing of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) and the programme budget 2006-2007. Informal Consultations were held on oversight and governance and procurement reform. Informal Consultations on Human Resources Management Reform continued and discussions on the Secretary General Reports were concluded on Thursday November 16th. Please find below a summary of the issues presented and raised.

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT REFORM

Human Resources Information Technology (A/61/255)

Background
In the Secretary-General's report on investing in information and communication technology (ICT), he outlined the organizational strategy to do so, which is to align ICT priorities with Secretariat performance objectives (A/60/846/Add.1). A major component of this strategy will be the introduction of an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system to provide the Organization with new capability and tools to increase efficiency and effectiveness, transparency and accountability. Furthermore, the ERP system will facilitate the integration of currently fragmented process aspects of human resources management. It will, however, not resolve or eliminate the deficiencies and constraints currently hampering several strategic areas of human resources management, including recruitment, mobility, staff development and career support.

Reportedly, Questions and Answers included:

Why is there a need for a new system? Will the proposed Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system not provide for the needs of Human Resources? As to improving transparency with a new system, will applicants be able to find information on the status of their application? How will it help with mobility? How will it do what Member States want it to do and reflect the needs of staff?
The old system is a home-grown system to which module after module has been added as new needs were identified. With each new module, unwanted ripple-effects occur in the other modules. It has been difficult to create reports, especially for those who have not worked with the system for very long. There have been technical difficulties as well as a near hacking incident. New technology is needed to facilitate the screening of applications (we now have more than 350,000 applications per year, although many are not serious candidates), to assist in better reporting, to keep track of skills, to assist with career development, as well as rostering, etc. No ERP system can provide for the specific needs of Human Resources, but one can find applications that are compatible with ERP. What we need will be an add-on to ERP. The new system will improve transparency as managers can see who has applied. Communications with candidates, as well as the advertisement and criteria for positions will be available on-line. Due to the necessity of confidentiality, not all available information can be provided to candidates however.

Has Human Resources liaised with UNDP and UNICEF, which both have different systems, in order to see what lessons can be learned there? What about the timeline and training for the new system? What countries are the trainers coming from? Can we receive more information on what will be available on a new system and to whom? How long have vacancies remained open, where are the bottlenecks?
We have been in contact with other agencies to exchange information and benefit from their experiences. We have learned that, the management and maintenance of the system is equally as important as the technical aspects of the system. The HR processes need to be streamlined, and only after we design a more ideal process should we finalize our technological needs. Training will be differentiated as per the various audiences.
We are not satisfied with the overall treatment of accountability. We feel that our recommendations have been poorly implemented in the past. Can we have a written definition of accountability?

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The Chair decided that accountability would be taken up after the management performance report discussions.

Civilian Career Peacekeepers (A/61/255)

There are 2500 civilian career peacekeepers. How was this number arrived at? How are these posts financed – always by peacekeeping missions or sometimes from Headquarters? Will this not create a sense of unfairness in the temporary peacekeeping staff? Is it not discriminatory? What about the costs of transferring permanent staff – would you not be paying staff for weeks or months in between missions? What are the criteria for selecting the 2500 peacekeepers? Are there other possible ways to deal with high vacancy and high turnover rates?

The volume and nature of peacekeeping has changed a great deal since the early 1990s. It used to be that peacekeeping consisted of a few hundred non-married men with a military background who would come and go. However, the need for professional and civilian peacekeepers grew due to the need for dealing with the logistical aspects, start-up, and security, for example. In order to deal with a constant expansion and contraction of peacekeeping needs, it will be good to have a baseline capacity of 2500 peacekeepers. We arrived at this number by realizing that the overall numbers for peacekeeping operations in the last fifteen years never went below 2600. We then assessed what occupational groups were represented and what we will need for rapid deployment. We came to a figure of 3250 posts. Considering a 20% vacancy rate, we came to 2500 posts, most of these being P4 to D1, non-professional posts, and mostly technicians. To be one of the 2500, one has to agree to mobility and rapid deployment. Recruitment of these 2500 will be through a competitive process thus making it fair. The Under-Secretary-General (USG) will be able to laterally move staff, which could not be done before. The costs will be charged to the mission where they serve. Currently we lose the good people before the mission is closed because they need to look for new jobs. (One delegate reportedly suggested a termination bonus to ensure that missions are being closed properly.) We will not have to issue a new contract when these staff members start at a new post and will just have to do a personnel action.

Additional questions can be submitted to the Chair and answers will be provided in writing.

Management Performance Board: Report of the Secretary-General (A/61/319)

Background

In May 2005, the Secretary-General established the Management Performance Board as a measure to strengthen the accountability framework of senior managers, and was responsible for monitoring and analyzing the manner in which senior managers exercise all aspects of their authority to ensure that they are properly undertaking the responsibilities that have been entrusted to them. The present report summarizes the activities undertaken by the Board since its inception, particularly in relation to the human resources action plans and the senior management compacts between the Secretary-General and programme managers.

Personnel from the Management Performance Board (MPB) and the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) were present at the Fifth Committee Informal Consultations on Thursday November 16, 2006 to answer questions raised by Member States in regards to the report of the Management Performance Board (A/61/319).

They explained that the annual overview of accountability report did not live up to expectations. This is more than likely due to the fact that the terms of reference were not rigorous enough while the exercise being conducted now has more strict TORs and it is a better tool for managers. In July 2006 the first review of the Human Resources action plan covering 2005/2006 was conducted and the compact submitted by the Secretary General was reviewed. In early 2007 the Board will meet to review the management performance of 2006.

The MPB is a new mechanism that was formed in May 2005. We are still in the first cycle and in a period of adjustment. The frequency of feedback to managers is still being discussed and it will probably be worked out in relation to the problems to be identified in the compacts.

Currently, 28 departments and offices are participating to the exercise and working with peacekeeping operations. The statistical profile was reviewed by the MPB and there are differences in compliance with established targets, however, a common feature is that geographical and gender targets were not achieved across most departments.

Member States reportedly asked: Now that III cycle has been completed we would like to know what the rate of achievement of each target was. Were departments given specific training for achieving these targets? Reviewing the achievements obtained, what picture do you have of the quality of management? Are people being designated according to their skills? Also, in terms of setting the targets, on what basis do you set targets? For example, target 11 says that you are monitoring the share of developing countries and of countries with economies in transition. Why are these two categories separated when we never made such a distinction in our discussions?

OHRM reportedly replied that in [A/61/257](#), information is provided on what was achieved in the II and III cycle and we can see the trend of success, or lack thereof, in different departments. Some departments met the targets set, others did not perform satisfactorily and that is explained with respect to each target. The report provides data on the trend from 2003 to 2006, and we will provide updated information and data at the beginning of next year. We are now closing the full cycle and collecting the data with respect to targets. As far as the question regarding the basis on which we set the current target, we did so by drawing on General Assembly mandates related to geographical and gender balance etc. We tried to make the mandates practical by giving indicators and data, citing progress made, and offering specific help (for example, with respect to compliance with the performance appraisal system, considering that some departments may need training to reach the targets). This support is not based on cycle but is offered on an ad hoc basis.

When it comes to the distinction made between developing countries and countries with economies in transition, we added "awareness" indicators where we see that there is some guidance that can be received from GA resolutions; however, these indicators are not mandatory.

How can management set a target that is not legally defined in any legislative document? We do not encourage further compartmentalization. Steady references are needed and should have been discussed by Member States. If you look at the overall picture, what is the threshold of acceptability of non-compliance? Does it coincide with the Member States level of tolerance?

When a department has a range of 80% to 100% of targets met, we regard this as satisfactory. We also, however, need to consider that compliance with some targets is subject to fluctuation in different departments, and thus we should look at the yearly picture rather than at only at each cycle. We also need to look at the composition of each department. For example, in the case of gender balance, if one department has a composition of 30% female officers, in order to achieve 50% it might require more recruitment than the department needs or can afford.

Consultants and Individuals Contractors: Report of the Secretary-General ([A/61/257/Add.3](#))

Background

The report covers the use of consultants and individual contractors during 2004 and 2005. It provides information on their duties, with statistics for the biennium and for each year of the two-year period. In the biennium 2004-2005, fewer consultants and individual contractors were hired and contracts granted as compared to 2002-2003. Furthermore, the report also defines a consultant as "an individual who is a recognized authority or specialist in a specific field, engaged by the United Nations under temporary contract in an advisory or consultative capacity to the Secretariat," and defines an individual contractor as "an individual engaged by the Organization from time to time under temporary contract to provide expertise, skills or knowledge for the performance of a specific task or piece of work against payment of an all-inclusive fee."

Why did the total expenditure on the hiring of consultants go up from 2004 to 2005? Where is the trend for 2006?
The OHRM reportedly replied that the increase in expenditure is due to daily cost increases, and also depends on the level of consultants employed.

Is there any external evaluation that monitors the performance of consultants? What is the breakdown? What are the criteria there? How are these decisions made? Does OHRM have a role in approving or disapproving contracts? Are consultants hired using extra-budgetary resources?

The Human Resources Action Plan provides directions for managers on the hiring of consultants. We have well defined procedures as to engagement of consultants and we can provide those provisions to MS. Definition, general principles, terms of reference, selectiveness, importance of geographical and gender balance are all covered. In terms of resources used, a particular department will make the request when their budget is being considered, and thus funds from the department's own budget will be used for the consultants. More details on the process of hiring will be provided in writing.

In par. 10 to 11 of the report there reference to a significant number of countries providing consultants. Nevertheless, in 2004 only two countries provided more than 100 consultants each in 2005 we see the same situation unfolding. Why are so many consultants coming from the same 2 countries? Why are there only a few countries from which most consultants are hired? Could there be a public database to look up where and how consultants are needed?
In 2004 a significant number of nationalities were represented with the hiring of consultants from 144 countries. The reason that there is a preponderance of 2 countries in the hiring of consultants is that consultants are usually hired locally by the duty stations, thus, there will inevitably be a preponderance of nationals from the largest duty

station.

As far as providing a database, with the current situation, it will be technically impossible as we have several databases and we consolidate them only once in a while. However, once the ERP is established, we should be able to provide for such a service.

Employment of retired former staff: Report of the Secretary General (**A/61/257/Add.2**)

Background

During the General Assembly meeting of 10 August 2006, a report on the employment of retired former staff was presented. It provides information on retired former staff engaged during the biennium 2004-2005 by year, number of retirees and engagements by type, duration of service, contractual modalities, categories, functions, and grade/level. The total number of retirees hired in 2004-2005 decreased, compared with the biennium 2002-2003. Furthermore, four departments/office employed 76.7 per cent of all retirees, and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management was the largest user of retirees. Retirees engaged during the period represented 74 nationalities and 42 per cent of the employed retirees were women.

Member States reportedly inquired about current practices, number of retired staff employed, criteria being used for their employment, nature of contracts, etc…

What is the main reason that we have to employ retirees? Where is the fault there? What are the criteria? Is there a separate performance evaluation for retired employees employed by the organization? In terms of accountability, what is the framework there? Is there a different policy of termination for contracts?

The OHRM reportedly explained that sometimes, the best interest of the organization is served by hiring retirees who are experienced and who are able to immediately enhance the capacity of the office. The definition of retiree goes back to par. 4 of the Secretary General's report A/53/526 and indicates someone older than 55 and receiving pension from the UN. Over the biennium, the organization has employed 491 retired staff. In line with the provisions, two departments employed most of them, the Department of the General Assembly and the Department of Conference Management. Retirees were also employed by Humanitarian Assistance and Peacekeeping.

Lately there has been a decrease in hiring of retirees as compared to previous years. Also, in this case the total expenditure has seen an increase due to a number of factors, such as changes in the conditions of employments and levels of expertise required. Section 7 in the report underlines that the total number of staff retained beyond age of separation decreased. The overall trend is decreasing. In the case of employment of retired staff, the role of OHRM is that of monitoring the implementation of policies and adherence to guidelines by departments.

As far as the evaluation of their performance is concerned, retired staff employed for more than six months will be evaluated through the performance appraisal system. In any case, a note will be made with respect to their performance.

What about the comment made by ACABQ that better HR planning should reduce the number of retirees employed by the Organization? Does the OHRM share this view? Also, does OHRM ask for a definite justification in the hiring of retired staff in the same fashion as it does for the employment of male staff or staff from overrepresented countries?

In terms of better HR planning, we are currently making information available to departments on which personnel will be retiring in five years, so that they have enough time to find a replacement. Hopefully, this will decrease the need to hire retirees in the future.

What is difficult to understand is how can there not be anyone in the system who does not want to be promoted or move to that post throughout the whole system? Can you give us a practical example of a situation where there is no other choice but hiring a retiree?

The rationale for hiring a retiree is included in the overall provisions of guidance and comprises fulfillment of several conditions which show that operational requirement cannot be performed by the available specialized staff, as well as the hiring be cost effective and always in the best interests of the Organization. There should be an interval of at least three months from retirement to reemployment and geographical and gender targets must be taken into consideration.

With respect to providing a practical case of the necessity to hire retired staff, peacekeeping can offer a good example. There are some key positions in the Democratic Republic of Congo at D2 level that we have had great difficulties in finding candidates for. We had to publish advertisement for the positions several times and do active outreach. Also, in that case we had to look at the situation in the field. Sometimes it is not wise to change people in a sensitive situation.

In terms of the use of consultants and hiring retired staff is there a priority between the two? Will their use be reduced by OHRM reform proposals? If so, which, consultants or retirees? Will the use of the 2500 civilian peacekeepers have an influence on the use of consultants?

Consultancy jobs are time bound, may be based on delivering a project, and always based on expertise. Consultants are not part of the regular staff and cannot supervise staff. They are a temporary measure. Retired staff are part of the regular staff, they can supervise staff and have all the accountabilities of regular staff. As for a possible decrease in the use of retired staff and consultants, following the reforms we cannot tell at this time. There is a likelihood that employment of retired staff will decrease, and we are also monitoring closely instances where both are employed.

With respect to the 2500 civilian peacekeepers program, this will have more of an impact on the use of retired staff which is a response to the difficulty in hiring at senior positions.

Composition of the Secretariat: Report of the Secretary General ([A/61/257](#))

Background

During the General Assembly meeting of 15 August 2006, a report on the composition of the Secretariat was presented. The report, covering the period from 1 Jul 2005 to 30 June 2006, provides information on important demographic characteristics of the Secretariat and the system of desirable ranges for the geographical distribution of staff. In this report, the population used was expanded from staff with contracts of one year or more to include all staff with valid contracts as of 30 June 2006, irrespective of source of funding, type of engagement, duration of contract, level, or duty station. Specifically, the report included statistics on gender and geographical balance. For example, of the global Secretariat staff, 63.7 per cent are male and 36.3 per cent are female. Also, Nationals of 182 Member States are represented in all staff categories, as compared with 173 for staff in posts subject to geographical distribution, while nine Member States have no nationals among staff.

Member States reiterated their concern in regards to geographical balance and the fact that the secretariat is failing to achieve this target. What are the main impediments there? In particular, considering that females from developing countries are the least represented, what can be done? Also, better consolidated data would be more helpful. A suggestion would be to provide a chart of positions at P5 level and above separately from the lower level positions, the information should be organized by nationality and type of position. It seems that some departments are more in favor of certain regions.

The OHRM reportedly explained that the picture of non compliance with geographical targets is not static, some Member States moved from being under represented just a few years ago, to currently being over represented. The nationality examination is one of the best ways to address the under-representation but it is not the only way, as many vacancies at professional level can be filled through external applications. Nevertheless, we are still very concerned that despite all measures taken in the past years, we are still facing this problem. Thus, more measures are being proposed, which include the increased attention by the Management Performance Board to the HR action plan. We are also meeting with under-represented member states to discuss what measures could be taken for a more effective outreach. With regards to ensuring that the number of employees from over represented states decreases, we are expecting that there will be a natural decline with retirement.

The G77 reportedly stated that the group is concerned with the geographical representation at the P and D levels but also at USG and ASG levels. We would like to see a list of what countries occupied which posts during the last 15 to 20 years. We are also concerned about the fact that females are still not able to attain ASG and USG level positions. We are of the impression that the current system needs some shake up, and we may need to be looking at other options. For example, the base used for establishing the system of desirable ranges is not logical and should be changed.

Member States also expressed concern that the national examination system should be used better to achieve geographical and gender balance. Currently, few people are recruited using that system, and the others stay on the roster too long and their qualifications expire. We need to think of a better way to recruit people on the rosters.

The following Secretary General reports were also discussed:

- [A/61/257/Add. 1](#) "Gratis personnel provided by governments and other entities"
- [A/61/228](#) "Human Resources Management Reform"
- [A/61/201](#) "Comprehensive policy guidelines for consultants in the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees"

DPI REPORTS ON GENERAL DISCUSSIONS OF THE FIFTH COMMITTEE
Financing of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT)
Revised 2006-2007 Budget for Cote D'Ivoire Mission

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