



## U.N. REFORM WATCH no. 23

*Analyses from Associates of CENTER FOR U.N. REFORM EDUCATION*

The Center does not endorse any particular reform proposal and has no affiliation with any governments. All expressions of opinion contained in its publications are the sole responsibility of the author or authors.

### MUCH NEEDED CHANGE IN UN HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES GETS A TIMID START

by Irene Martinetti  
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*On December 22, 2006, the General Assembly is expected to approve a resolution on the reform of the UN's human resources management policies. The resolution provides some basis for improvement but leaves many questions open for further discussions. The article provides an analysis of the main issues at stake.*

The United Nations' human resources management policies, which have been under relentless scrutiny by the international community for several years, are partly to blame for the failure of the organization to fulfill its mandates effectively. The reasons for reform are numerous. Existing policies, originally devised for a stable staff at the Secretariat, are no longer suitable, as more than half of its personnel, 16,000, are currently serving in the field. Due to the numerous new functions that the organization is now performing, new skills are required, and the recruitment process needs to be substantially improved as well. The UN experiences severe difficulties in staffing missions in "undesired" locations. The current technological tools are also outdated and incompatible, and lack the capacity to effectively handle the massive number of applications received.

Most importantly, the current system lacks adequate results-based management measures. That managerial staff often escapes from being held accountable for errors and wrongdoings, has a dramatically negative impact on the organization's overall effectiveness. The current system seems inadequate to provide the organization with staff upholding the "highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity." Moreover, it has persistently failed to ensure employment "on as wide a geographical basis as possible," both essential conditions of recruitment as stipulated by the UN Charter.<sup>1</sup>

After a few meager attempts to reform the organization's human resources policies in 1997 and 2002,<sup>2</sup> United Nations' Member States finally agreed, at the World Summit in September 2005, that one of the essential steps to addressing the UN's admitted malaise would be a thorough reform of the Secretariat's human resources management policies. Thus, in August 2006, following the request from the Member States,<sup>3</sup> the Secretary General issued a report: "Investing in People."<sup>4</sup> The report offers a list of recommendations for substantial and overarching reform of the current system as well as an assessment of the measures already underway, which were agreed to previously.

The Secretary General's recommendations for significant improvement of the organization's human resources policies include: better integration of staff in the field and headquarters into one global Secretariat with increasingly harmonized conditions of service; and enhancement of the organization's ability to attract and retain high-quality staff. In order to address the current system's shortcomings, the Office of Human Resources Management proposes, *inter alia*: stimulation of mobility of staff, which includes mobility as a necessary step for promotion; better career development opportunities and training tools, especially with respect to building leadership; use of "pre-screened rosters" of candidates selected



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for general job descriptions, as opposed to the current rosters where candidates are selected on the basis of specific job positions; streamlining of contractual arrangements into one UN staff contract featuring only three types of appointments (temporary, fixed term and continuing contracts); harmonized conditions of service; reform of the field service entailing the creation of 2500 civilian career peacekeepers to ensure rapid deployment; and a one-time staff buyout.

In a previous proposal, “Investing in the United Nations for a stronger organization worldwide,”<sup>5</sup> the Secretary General also provided a framework for the outsourcing of many services, such as printing, which are currently provided at headquarters, with the aim to decrease spending at the Secretariat. However, this proposal encountered strong opposition from staff unions as well as from some Member States, particularly developing countries, and it was not included in the latest recommendations.

Presently, a draft resolution is being discussed at the Fifth Committee and is expected to be proposed for adoption at the General Assembly by the end of December 2006. Nonetheless, as the package of reforms raises several complicated questions that will reverberate throughout the whole UN system, Member States are encountering difficulties in reaching agreement and it is expected that many reforms will be left for further discussion at the Fifth Committee’s ‘resumed sessions’ next year. This delay was also recommended by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions<sup>6</sup> in its Report on Human Resources Management.<sup>7</sup>

## **Contentious Issues**

Member States have expressed substantially different approaches to the reform of the UN’s human resources management framework, in particular, in regard to the enforcement of geographical and gender targets, the criteria for the recruitment of candidates, mobility of staff, career development, harmonization of conditions of service, and reform of the field service. Decisions on most of these issues were partially, or entirely, postponed for further discussions at the resumed session, likely in May 2007.

### *Recruitment and Equitable Geographic Distribution*

As to the recruitment process, the Russian Federation and CANZ (Canada, Australia and New Zealand), with the support of the EU, have been seeking to strengthen the application of merit as the primary factor in the selection of staff, while the G77 and China have insisted that geographical balance be considered equally. The G77 and China also seek to involve the central review bodies in the selection of candidates in order to ensure better enforcement of geographical balance.

With regards to addressing geographical balance of UN staff, the G77 has repeatedly stated that the system is in need of a fundamental “shake up” in order to be able to meet its targets. As of June 2006, eighteen Member States were unrepresented, eleven Member States were underrepresented and twenty-one Member States were overrepresented.<sup>8</sup> Such a “shake-up” would involve more extensive targeted recruitment outreach towards unrepresented and underrepresented countries, but should also include a revision of the way geographical targets are set. Currently, the three criteria used to determine how many staff each Member State is entitled to are membership, contribution, and population.<sup>9</sup> On several occasions, the G77 and China have mentioned that this system needs to be revised. Nevertheless, the draft



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resolution currently proposed for adoption does not seem to provide for a substantial shift in the way the organization approaches the achievement of geographical targets.

### *Accountability and Equitable Geographic Distribution*

Member States have lamented that insufficient accountability of senior staff is to blame for the lack of compliance with equitable geographic distribution of staff. In order to enforce managerial staff's compliance with geographical balance targets, the G77 and China propose that the Management Performance Board establish an advisory panel to monitor the implementation of the principle of equitable representation.

The Russian Federation, in particular, has shown resistance to the approval of a stronger accountability framework in regards to geographical and gender targets, by pointing out that some of the accountability targets currently used by the Secretariat have never specifically been endorsed by the General Assembly and jeopardize application of merit as the main factor for employment of staff. With respect to the provision that a manager's delegation of authority be revoked when he or she fails to meet geographical and gender targets, the Russian Federation has declared such a practice to be inconsistent with approved procedures.

### *Other Approaches to Address Equitable Geographic Distribution*

The G77 and China have proposed, *inter alia*, that senior positions at the Under Secretary General and Assistant Secretary General (USG and ASG) levels should rotate between developed and developing countries and that the Secretary General should ensure that there is no monopoly of a Member State or group of Member States on senior posts.<sup>10</sup>

### **Reform Issues Postponed**

Some of the contentious points which will be deferred for further discussions, as per ACABQ recommendations, include: reform of contractual arrangements; managed mobility policy; reform of the field service; and the harmonization of the conditions of service.

#### *Mobility*

The mobility policy, also referred to as the 'mandatory managed reassignment programme,' has been formulated by the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) to create a more versatile international civil service capable of fulfilling both the standing requirements of Headquarters as well as the mandates of the field. In the vision of OHRM, an organizational culture needs to be created where mobility is accepted as an essential element of international civil service.<sup>11</sup> Mandatory mobility has already been applied to P2 staff since 2000. The staff have been offered contracts that include the condition that career development would be linked to mobility. Staff are expected to move twice before promotion to a higher position. Following the Secretariat's proposal, mandatory mobility would be extended to all regular staff. The Secretary General is also asking for more authority to move staff around when needed.



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The mobility policy proposal has been received with skepticism by both the ACABQ, and by Member States, who expressed substantially different views on how, and to what extent, such policy should be implemented. In fact, the ACABQ noted, with concern, that expanding the managed mobility scheme is likely to present unforeseen financial, administrative and management implications.<sup>12</sup>

The Russian Federation and the G77 and China are reticent to approve the proposal and expressed concern that the General Assembly never endorsed a system-wide mandate for mobility policy. Concerns with regards to the policy include reservations that it might infringe on the rights of staff. Member States require more detailed information on its implementation before making any decisions. Japan also expressed reluctance to approve the requested resources until more detailed proposals are provided on how additional resources will be used.

On the other hand, the EU, together with CANZ, and the US, supports mobility policy and is willing to approve the additional resources requested by the Secretariat for the establishment of five temporary positions.

### *Contractual Arrangements, Harmonization of Conditions of Service, and Reform of the Field Service*

The reform of the United Nations' contractual arrangements, which entails the streamlining of UN contracts into a single UN staff contract, has been proposed by the Secretariat to reduce the considerable administrative load and errors, and to be more equitable to staff in the field.<sup>13</sup> The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, however, has suggested that Member States seek the opinion of the International Civil Service Commission before making any decisions in this regard. Even though the EU, and the western powers in general,<sup>14</sup> were inclined to make a decision aimed at simplifying the current contractual arrangements, the G77, Japan and the Russian Federation insisted on hearing the ICSC recommendations before discussing the issue any further.

The decision on the streamlining of contracts is related to the harmonization of the conditions of service and the reform of the field service through the creation of 2500 civilian career peacekeepers.<sup>15</sup> With respect to the latter in particular, an agreement will be difficult to achieve, even at the resumed session, because of the fundamental differences in the approach towards peacekeeping that Member States have expressed. While the EU agrees with the Secretary General's proposal that peacekeeping should be professionalized because it is a function of the UN that is only likely to increase in the next few decades, the G77 is adamant in claiming that peacekeeping should not be professionalized because it has been created as a temporary entity and should continue to be considered as such. The G77 has suggested that it envisages peacekeeping to be a function that the UN will not have to perform for much longer, and thus it would be nonsensical to create positions within the Secretariat specifically for peacekeeping. Japan also expressed skepticism towards the proposal due to the fact that, if peacekeeping is indeed temporary, creating fixed positions for peacekeeping within the Secretariat might generate financial difficulties in the future. Nevertheless, according to the Secretariat's estimates, peacekeeping will be a UN function for at least two more decades, and the creation of 2500 civilian career peacekeepers within the Secretariat is crucial in order to properly address the current high vacancy rates and the difficulties in staffing missions with experienced personnel. The ACABQ report also recommends that the Secretariat provide further detailed information on the proposal, including an analysis of potential financial implications.<sup>16</sup>



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### **DECISIONS TAKEN:**

Some of the issues agreed upon so far include:

#### *Recruitment*

Approval of funds for the recruitment and staffing center requested by the Secretariat will be deferred to the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009. Member States request that the expedited recruitment process be limited exclusively to surge needs, while the G77 and China refuse to accept the Secretary General's suggestion to reduce the number of days required for advertising a vacancy from 60 to 30 days. Member States recognize that the use of pre-screened rosters could expedite the recruitment process but deferred its use to a later stage while requesting that the Secretariat make full use of the existing rosters. The draft resolution also establishes that, when recruiting in the field, knowledge of the official language(s) spoken should be taken into account as an additional asset. Limitations for assignment of General Service staff to field missions will not be lifted.

#### *Geographical Balance*

The current draft resolution recognizes that, under the current system, managerial staff is not held sufficiently accountable in achieving equitable geographic distribution. Member States request the Secretary General to involve the Management Performance Board in monitoring implementation of the provisions on accountability contained in the Human Resources Action Plan. It also requests that the Plan be available to the public via the UN website. The Secretariat is urged to reduce the number of under-or-unrepresented Member States within its staff by 30% by the year 2010. The SG should also ensure, "as a general rule" that no national of a Member State succeeds a national of that same state in a senior post.

#### *Mobility*

Member States approved the establishment of three new temporary positions and additional appropriations of \$331,000 and \$35,400 to provide support for mobility policies already approved.

#### *IT Reform*

The current draft resolution approves the Secretariat's proposal to improve human resources management IT tools to be integrated into the future Enterprise Resource Planning System (ERP). Member States approved the establishment of six new temporary posts for an amount of \$1,521,000 under the budget for 2006-2007, as per recommendation by ACABQ.<sup>17</sup> Member States also decided to grant the Secretary General the authority for spending an estimated \$864,000 under the peacekeeping operations budget. It was requested that the Secretariat ensure that the IT system is available in the UN's two official languages and to report on implementation of the reforms by 2008.

#### *Accountability*

Provisions with regards to enhancing accountability of staff at the Secretariat would fit in the framework of the mandate of the Ethics Office and the work of the Management Performance Board especially with an aim to enforce accountability of senior management. Member States requested that the Secretary General submit a detailed proposal for the use of sanctions and incentives as an integral element of personnel management for further discussion in 2008. Furthermore, Member States requested that the Secretariat improve accountability and monitoring and control mechanisms and report on implementation by 2008.

#### *Staff buyout*

Member States decided against the approval of the staff buyout proposal and the related resources asked for by the Secretariat in agreement with the recommendations of the ACABQ, on the premise that a buyout should not be



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used to address instances of under-and-non performance. The ACABQ also takes note that a significant number of staff will reach retirement within the next five years and this will have an impact at managerial levels.

### *Gender Representation*

Member States requested that the Secretary General increase his efforts to obtain gender parity and report to the General Assembly on the progress achieved by 2008. The Secretary General was also asked to enhance his efforts to increase the quota of women from developing countries serving the organization and submit further proposals to this end.

### *Training*

As per recommendation by the ACABQ,<sup>18</sup> Member States approved an appropriation of an additional \$3 million dollars for career development support.

### *Employment of retired staff*

With respect to the tendency of hiring retired staff well beyond their mandatory age of separation, Member States share the ACABQ concerns that such a trend reveals fundamental weakness in advance planning. Such instances should be adequately justified, documented and occur only as exceptional cases.

### *Consultants and Individual Contractors (A/61/257/Add.3)*

Member States share the ACABQ concern that expenditure and use of individual contractors decreased and the use of contractors might have been understated, thus Member States require further substantially more analytical and detailed reporting.

## **Conclusion**

The draft resolution currently under discussion provides some useful basis to advance the reform of the human resources management policies at the UN; however, although some progress has been made, many substantial questions remain open. Hopefully, by the first half of 2007, most of these issues will be resolved.

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<sup>1</sup> As per Article 101, Paragraph 3 of the UN Charter: "The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible."

<sup>2</sup> GAO Report

<sup>3</sup> World Summit Outcome Document (A/RES/60/1), Article 163.

<sup>4</sup> A/61/255 August , 2006

<sup>5</sup> A/60/692, March 7, 2006

<sup>6</sup> The ACABQ is a 16 member subsidiary organ of the GA which has, inter alia, the important task to advise the Fifth Committee on administrative and budgetary matters referred to it.

<sup>7</sup> A/61/537, October 26, 2006

<sup>8</sup> A/61/257 Par. 63, August 15, 2006

<sup>9</sup> For more info read: A/61/257, Annex I

<sup>10</sup> The US currently has 52 staff at senior posts level (D1, D2, ASG and USG), the Russian Federation 21, Germany and the UK 18, A/61/257 Annex II, Table A.3

<sup>11</sup> A/61/255 Par. 122-173

<sup>12</sup> A/61/537, Par. 30

<sup>13</sup> Peacekeeping staff is usually hired on a 300 series contract.

<sup>14</sup> For "western powers" read: EU, US and CANZ

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<sup>15</sup> For more information with regards to the 2500 civilian career peacekeepers proposal read: [Fifth Committee Report: Week of November 13-17, 2006](#), *Center for UN Reform Education*

<sup>16</sup> A/61/537, Par. 74-77

<sup>17</sup> A/61/537, Par. 68

<sup>18</sup> A/61/537, Par. 48