



U.N. REFORM WATCH^{no. 25}

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

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BAN KI-MOON'S FIRST MONTH IN OFFICE An Overview of Advice Given and Actions Taken

by Irene Martinetti
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In the few months that followed the selection of Ban Ki-moon as the new Secretary General, professors, diplomats, politicians, NGOs, journalists, and other "UN experts" made their voices heard - in concerto or solo - by providing him with advice and proposals. This article outlines the priorities that have been entrusted to the new Secretary General and offers an evaluation of the relevant actions he has taken - especially in regard to moving reform proposals forward - during his first month in office.

In the last few months of 2006, a panel of UN experts brought together by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) and the Ralph Bunche Institute,¹ as well as a series of articles in UNA/USA's publication "The Interdependent,"² among many others, offered a number of suggestions regarding the next steps the Secretary General (SG) should take once in office. One of the major undertakings that the "Ban Ki-moon administration" is expected to make a priority, and embark upon promptly, is the reform of the management of the Secretariat, including a substantial improvement of performance-based management of the UN system worldwide. The new SG is also expected to work towards bridging the increasingly damaging North-South divide; pacifying the troubled relationship between the US and the UN; strengthening the functionality of peacekeeping operations; bolstering the Peacebuilding Commission; improving the standing of the new Human Rights Council; and pressing for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

MANAGEMENT REFORM

Most UN experts concur that management reform must be on top of the agenda. It is widely recognized that management reform underpins all other reforms and that establishing a stronger performance-based management culture is the only way to restore the image of the UN as a functioning organization capable of delivering its programs effectively. To date, Ban Ki-moon has initiated action on a few pressing issues: human resources, reorganization of the Secretariat's departments dealing with peace and security, transparency and accountability of senior management, and a system-wide risk assessment and external audits of UN operations worldwide. He has also begun to make appointments and taken other actions, some of which seem to follow recommendations discussed below, and others that do not. These too are discussed in more detail towards the end of this report.

Suggestions for additional actions by the new SG include: exerting efforts to strengthen the standing of the international civil service - beginning with the SG himself acting as a role model for integrity and transparency;³ fostering a major overhaul of hiring practices and internal communications⁴ by resisting pressure from Member States for political appointments in order to gain autonomy and the ability to appoint the most qualified people who are geographically representative to senior positions;⁵ simplifying accountability by reorganizing, combining or reducing the multitude of offices in various existing departments; and trimming the long list of special envoys.⁶



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Further recommendations include: continuing to advocate for human resources reforms and improve transparency in the case of senior appointments. Other steps include investing in improved analytical capabilities, specifically directed to address shortfalls in strategic planning⁷ and resisting wasteful micromanagement by Member States.⁸ In addition, while some have suggested that the SG take advantage of the buyout program to get rid of “deadwood” and stale bureaucracy to make space for more bright young people in the organization,⁹ others believe that the SG should instead not focus on this, as many of the relevant staff members will retire soon anyway.¹⁰

Human Resources

James Traub, on the pages of Foreign Policy, suggested that the new SG should establish a closer relationship with his staff.¹¹ The last two SGs have had a tendency to isolate themselves from the Secretariat’s staff, which may have had a negative impact on the staff’s sense of commitment to the organization. Thus, Traub suggests that at times the SG should take his lunch at the UN Cafeteria. The advice was apparently taken. In his first week in office, there he was, Ban Ki-moon, with his tray having lunch with other employees. Ban Ki-moon has also indicated that he may visit offices without advance warning, a notion that not all senior staff appreciates.

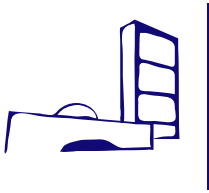
Transparency and Accountability of Senior Management

With respect to fostering more transparency of UN senior officials’ finances, Ban Ki-moon started on a very good footing. On his first day in office he provided complete personal financial disclosure to the Ethics Office. It was submitted to PricewaterhouseCoopers for evaluation and made available to the public on January 26th.¹² His initiative sets new ground as Kofi Annan did submit his financial disclosure for internal evaluation but never agreed to make it public. The new SG is setting himself up as an example for all other senior officials. Given that public disclosure of senior officials’ finances is already common practice for some governments, it is still important for UN senior officials to set an example of good governance for all Member States.

Transparency of senior appointments?

During his first few days in office, Ban Ki-moon asked more than 30 top officials at the Assistant Secretary General (ASG) levels and above to offer their resignation. His action was seen as a sign that he seeks to take swift control of the Secretariat’s senior appointments. Thus far, each incoming SG had kept most of the top level staff on board. To date the new SG has appointed a few senior officials: Indian diplomat Vijay Nambiar as Chief of Staff, Haitian journalist Michele Montas as spokesperson, Mexican biologist Alicia Barcena Ibarra as Under Secretary General (USG) for administration and management, British diplomat John Holmes as USG for humanitarian affairs, and Asha Rosa Migiro, foreign minister of Tanzania, as his Deputy Secretary General (D-UNSG). The appointments reflect an attempt to satisfy both the ambitions of Security Council Member States as well as those of the most powerful developing countries.

Some of Ban Ki-moon’s appointments have met with criticism not only for the manner in which they were made, namely the scarcity of transparency in the hiring process, but also because of the lack of specific experience of some of the officials in the work of the departments they have been assigned to direct. For instance, Mr. Holmes, who will be heading OCHA, has limited prior experience with humanitarian affairs and Ms. Ibarra, at the head of the Department of Management, is an environmentalist considered lacking sufficient experience in management. Also, Ms. Ibarra was



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working as Chief of Staff for Kofi Annan during his last year in office and some have taken her appointment to signify that little will be changing with respect to the *modus cogitandi* of senior management at the Secretariat.¹³

Most criticized was perhaps the appointment of Ms. Migiro. The UN media community has expressed concern that she does not have demonstrable, relevant, and high-profile management experience having been foreign minister for a few months only.¹⁴ The post of Deputy-United Nations Secretary General (D-UNSG) is generally seen as one entailing a great deal of management skills. Most believe that, as Sir Brian Urquhart noted, the SG should not see himself as a management oriented CEO as the D-UNSG should serve that purpose.¹⁵ This is an even more sensitive issue at this time, as management reform at the UN is ongoing and needs to be pushed forward vigorously. Thus, one would have expected Ban to choose a D-UNSG with exceedingly strong management qualities, especially since he has often made clear his intention to delegate to the D-UNSG most of the day-to-day management of the Secretariat.

In light of his first appointments, Ban Ki-moon does not seem to have taken the advice that senior appointments should be made more transparently. The UN media community has lamented that the senior staff appointed was not interviewed properly. In some cases, Ban barely spoke with the staff member being considered before deciding the appointment (i.e. Ms. Migiro). In his defense, he explained that he has known well and worked closely with most of the people selected and did not think it necessary to follow a strict procedure for the appointments.¹⁶ A list of further senior appointments from the Secretary General is expected by the first week of February.

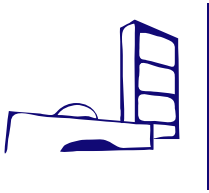
A multi-functional staff

Another step taken to date relates to promoting mobility amongst staff with the scope of creating a more multi-functional cadre of staff at the Secretariat. Ban Ki-moon decided to invite all UN staff, including those currently employed by UN agencies, funds and programs to apply for the positions currently available at the SG's Executive Office. All senior managers in the Secretariat are expected to follow suit and create opportunities for increased mobility between different departments.

Peace and Security

Within the context of reforming the Secretariat, the new SG is endeavoring to improve the performance of the Secretariat's operations in matters of peace and security. To this end, Ban began consultations with Member States very early this year, concerning the restructuring of the Secretariat's peace and security departments. Initially, the SG proposed the reorganization of the Department of Disarmament Affairs (DDA) and the Peacebuilding Support Office by placing them within the Department of Political Affairs (DPA), thus creating a Department of Disarmament and Political Affairs.¹⁷ This proposal was firmly rejected by the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)¹⁸ and subsequently dropped.¹⁹ The NAM expressed major concern about the diminished role of the Department of Disarmament Affairs and the fact that the likely USG heading the reorganized department would be from the US, the main proponent of this merger. Rumors claim that the US has been pushing to have B. Lynn Pascoe, US Ambassador to Indonesia, given the post of USG at the DPA.

Most of NAM's members are non-nuclear states and have been lamenting how nuclear states, including the US, are lagging behind in their promises to reduce and eventually eliminate their



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stockpile of nuclear arms. On Jan 18th Ban's Chief of Staff, Vijay Nambiar, met with NAM to propose an alternative arrangement that would not change the status of DPA; the Department of Disarmament Affairs would maintain its current structure but it would become part of the SG's office and be headed by an ASG rather than a USG. This proposal is currently being evaluated by Member States. The NAM has declared that they will accept the arrangement only if they can be convinced that disarmament will not be downgraded amongst UN activities.

It was also reported that Ban Ki-moon is planning to separate DPKO Operations and Management sections, with the Operational side in charge of deployments, and the Management division responsible for logistical support and training. The two departments would be headed by, respectively, a French and a Japanese USG.²⁰ The reorganization is aimed at obtaining better operational efficiency but also at addressing instances of sexual misconduct by troops, a plight that the SG has repeatedly vowed to stop.

It should be noted that any plan for the reorganization of departments at the Secretariat is subject to the approval of the General Assembly (GA). The appointment of an American at the head of DPA, generally not welcome by the developing countries (constituting the majority in the GA), is likely to create some difficulties. It will be quite a task for the Secretary General to skillfully circumvent any impasse and obtain approval for his plan.

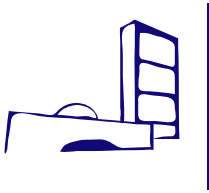
System-Wide Audit

During his first month at the helm of the organization, the SG requested that an overall risk assessment and external audit of operations of the United Nations, including its funds, programs and agencies be undertaken. It will be started in countries presenting issues of hard currency transactions, or that do not allow independence in the hiring of staff, and refuse access to UN personnel to review local projects funded by the UN. The operation will start with a risk assessment and external audit of UNDP's operations in North Korea. Mindful of the repercussions of the oil for food scandal, he ordered the system-wide inquiry immediately after recent public revelations that funds deployed for development activities in North Korea are contributing instead to the enrichment of Kim Jong Il's regime.

NORTH-SOUTH DIVIDE

In order to achieve the proposed reforms of the UN system, the SG needs to bridge the burning divide between the North and the South Member States. To do so, he will have to cope with the G77's negative perceptions of the management reforms as an attempt by the "West" to take stronger control of the reins of the organization. He can do so by taking advantage of his current untainted stance with the membership. James Traub, on the pages of FP, suggests that the SG make efforts to ensure that the membership perceives that they are all working towards common goals. It is imperative that from his first months in office the SG does not appear too easily influenced by the Western powers. Traub suggests the SG offer the G77 and the South something in return for the achievement of management, human rights and peacekeeping reforms, all priorities of the western powers, such as an increase in donors' contributions for development assistance.²¹

To date, in the appointment of his senior staff, the SG has shown due respect to geographical balance, a concept dear to the developing countries. Four out of five of the appointments made so far are natives of G77 Member States. The D-UNSG selected by Ban, Ms. Migiro, has been a "long time



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advocate of the cause of developing countries.”²² Her appointment should contribute to reducing the South’s wariness about management reforms at the Secretariat and hopefully facilitate future negotiations.

PACIFY THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE US AND THE UN

“With the US actively and constructively engaged, the potential of the UN is unlimited. And with the UN’s potential fulfilled, the US can better advance its aspirations for a peaceful, healthy, prosperous world”
(CSIS, Washington DC, Jan 16 2007)²³

Working on appeasing the troubled relationship between the US and the UN is one of the issues on the top of the agenda of the SG. Fifteen days after taking office, Ban Ki-moon went for the first time to Washington in his capacity as UNSG. He held meetings with President Bush and discussed with him a strengthened relationship between the UN and the US, the organization’s largest single donor.²⁴ Washington, following the Iraq debacle, has been showing itself more inclined to work its foreign policy through the Security Council. It will be Ban’s undertaking to repair the broken threads following the invasion of Iraq by the US led coalition of the willing, and Bolton’s short but vigorous swing at the UN. Ban Ki-moon has asked for increased cooperation and a lift of the peacekeeping spending cap (the US is currently paying only 25% of the assessed 27%).²⁵ He also urged the US to seek a seat on the Human Rights Council as he believes the stakes are too high for the US to sit on the sidelines. US participation, he suggests, in Human Rights Council proceedings would help increase the Council’s credibility.

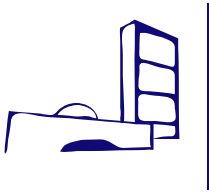
SECURITY COUNCIL REFORM

With respect to reforming the Security Council, Ban Ki-moon, during his campaign, indicated that he would not interfere with Member States’ discussions, but would push for the broadest possible agreement. While some have suggested that the SG should not seek a role at all in the process, others have recommended that the SG push for a limited use of the veto power in cases of humanitarian responses.²⁶

Others have suggested that the SG should exercise his good standing and profound knowledge of Asian politics to address the longstanding issue of “Inter-Asian tensions” which are contributing to the stalemate on the enlargement of the Council. The new SG would be in the position to intervene in the current dispute that sees India and Japan’s ambitions to become permanent members being counterweighted by China, a permanent member of the Security Council.²⁷

SG’s PUBLIC CONSCIENCE?

Finally, should the new SG undertake the role of “public conscience,” following the lead of Kofi Annan, and take a stance on moral questions?²⁸ Former US Ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, advised that the SG leave such questions to Member States. Ban Ki-moon’s first instinct, as Bolton seems to have gathered, would be that of leaving all questions of moral character to Member States.²⁹ In fact, as soon as he took office, when asked to comment on Saddam Hussein’s capital execution, Ban Ki-moon “instinctively” deferred the matter as one of sovereignty and for each MS to decide. The statement caused an uproar and later on, the SG explained that he would encourage Member States to follow the current trend towards a progressive decline in the use of the death penalty. During his trip in



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Europe, Ban Ki-moon endorsed the death penalty worldwide moratorium proposed by Italy at the Security Council. This is a hint that the new SG may seek to take a 'safe' stance on moral questions.

CONCLUSION

Looking at Ban Ki-moon's first month in office, it seems as though the new SG will be keeping his promise to push towards reform of the organization. He has already kicked off a series of initiatives, some of which have paid due regard to suggestions offered by external UN experts, while others have shown that he will need to counter pressures from Member States more strongly if he wants to achieve his objectives. In his second month in office, Ban Ki-moon is expected to provide additional plans for reforming the Secretariat and make more appointments. His D-UNSG is also expected to take office early in February. We are eager to see what other initiatives will be proposed and how they will unfold.

¹ Thomas J. Weiss and Peter J. Hoffman, "A Priority Agenda for the Next Secretary-General," Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung and Ralph Bunche Institute, December 2006

² Louise Frechette, Stephen Schlesinger, and Ellen Laipson offer their advice on the pages of *The Interdependent*, published by UNA/USA, Vol 4 No 4 Winter 2006/2007

³ Weiss and Hoffman, 2006 (FES and Ralph Bunche Institute Report)

⁴ Ellen Laipson, "Ban will want to assess the record of his predecessor, and determine which of Kofi Annan's legacy issues require continued engagement," *The Interdependent*, a UNA/USA Publication, Vol. 4 No. 4 Winter 2006/2007

⁵ Weiss and Hoffman, 2006 (FES and Ralph Bunche Institute Report) & Frechette, *The Interdependent*, Winter 2006/2007

⁶ Louise Frechette, "Ban Should Not Believe Those Who Claim the Secretariat is a Hopeless Mess," *The Interdependent*, a UNA/USA Publication, Vol. 4 No. 4 Winter 2006/2007

⁷ Weiss and Hoffman, 2006 (FES and Ralph Bunche Institute Report)

⁸ Frechette, *The Interdependent*, Winter 2006/2007

⁹ James Traub, "Marching Orders for the UN's Boss," *Foreign Policy*, January/February 2007

¹⁰ Weiss and Hoffman, 2006 (FES and Ralph Bunche Institute Report)

¹¹ Traub, *Foreign Policy*, January 2007

¹² "UN Chief Discloses Financial Status," *United Press International*, January 29, 2007

¹³ Mark Turner, "UN Chief Appoints Senior Aides to Top Posts," *Financial Times*, January 3, 2007

¹⁴ UN Noon's Briefing, January 5, 2006

¹⁵ Brian Urquhart, "The Next Secretary General: How to Fill a Job with No Description," *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2006

¹⁶ UN Noon's Briefing, January 5, 2006

¹⁷ Mark Dodd, "New Boss Clears Out UN Top Ranks," *The Australian*, January 11, 2007

¹⁸ The NAM is a group of 118 developing countries

¹⁹ "UN Chief to Drop Merger Plan," *Associated Press*, January 19, 2007

²⁰ Dodd, *The Australian*, January 2007

²¹ Traub, *Foreign Policy*, January 2007

²² "Statement of the Secretary General on the appointment of the Deputy Secretary General, January 5, 2007

²³ Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

²⁴ The EU countries contribute more than the US to the UN's regular budget. At July 2006, EU Member States contributions counted as a whole 37% against US 22%.

²⁵ The EU contributes more than 40%

²⁶ Weiss and Hoffman, 2006 (FES and Ralph Bunche Institute Report)

²⁷ Laipson, *The Interdependent*, Winter 2006/2007

²⁸ Weiss and Hoffman, 2006 (FES and Ralph Bunche Institute Report)

²⁹ John R. Bolton, "Do not ban your instincts, Ban Ki-moon," *Washington Post*, January 14, 2007