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Human resources management**Measures taken to address seven systemic human resources issues raised in the context of the reform of the internal system of administration of justice****Report of the Secretary-General***Summary*

The General Assembly, in its resolution 62/228, requested the Secretary-General to report on specific measures taken by the administration to address seven systemic human resources issues raised, in the context of the reform of the internal system of administration of justice, in the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Ombudsman (A/62/311). The issues identified are the staff selection system; mobility; locally recruited staff; contractual practices; special entities established by the United Nations; staff welfare; and coverage for psychological care.

* A/63/50.



I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 62/228, entitled “Administration of justice at the United Nations”, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to report on specific measures taken by the administration to address seven systemic human resources issues raised, in the context of the reform of the internal system of administration of justice, in the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Ombudsman (see A/62/311, sect. IV).

2. The seven issues identified by the Office of the Ombudsman are the staff selection system; mobility; locally recruited staff; contractual practices; special entities established by the United Nations; staff welfare; and coverage for psychological care.

3. In this regard, following the issuance of the report, the Department of Management convened meetings with the Office of the Ombudsman to obtain additional details with respect to each of those topics.

4. Also following the issuance of the report, the Secretary-General established a task force, chaired by the Deputy Secretary-General, which he specifically requested to find solutions to the problems identified by the Ombudsman in the interrelated areas of recruitment and contractual arrangements, including geographical distribution and gender; and career development, including mobility and training. Proposals emanating from that task force have been sent to the Secretary-General; those requiring consultations with staff will be discussed with them, including through the Staff-Management Coordination Committee. Although the work of the task force was driven by the human resources issues identified by the Ombudsman, its proposals go further, and are aimed at strengthening the human resources framework through policy changes, programmes and technology-based support tools. When implemented, the proposals will transform the organizational culture of the Secretariat as envisaged by the Secretary-General so that it is more responsive, focused on delivering results and committed to the highest standards of efficiency, accountability and integrity through the development of a highly skilled, well-trained and mobile workforce. Successful implementation will require partnerships between entities performing human resources functions and managers and heads of departments, as well as constructive engagement on the part of staff and staff representatives.

5. The Department of Management strongly agrees with the emphasis on the need for increased communications activities, as highlighted in several paragraphs of the report. Paragraphs 53 to 55 contain a reference to the need for the development of awareness-raising activities by the Office of the Ombudsman, and the Secretary-General strongly maintains that such awareness-raising in many areas needs to be a joint effort by both the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of Human Resources Management. It is only through better communication that staff can be made fully aware of the policies and procedures of the Organization. If information is readily available and easy to understand, then the frustration and concerns of staff can be more effectively addressed.

II. Systemic issues

A. Staff selection system

6. Paragraphs 41 to 43 of the report (A/62/311) highlight the importance of the staff selection system and the frustration of those staff who find that they are not selected during the competitive process mandated by the General Assembly. Because of the nature of any competitive system of recruitment, placement and promotion, there will always be one or several staff members who will not be selected for a particular post. In addition, a balance has to be struck between the need to place or promote existing internal staff and the need to attract external candidates. In the United Nations context, the Secretariat has to contend not only with that issue, but also with a system designed to ensure that appropriate consideration be given to the mandates of the General Assembly relating to geographical distribution and gender balance. Furthermore, the restriction on the movement of staff from the General Service to the Professional categories and the requirement of entry at the junior professional level through the national examination process have an impact on the staff selection system. The Secretariat has therefore had to develop a system which not only addresses those issues, but also balances other human resources needs, such as internal selection for lateral moves; promotions; increasing mobility; and oversight of the process (central review bodies). All of those components result in a complex United Nations staff selection system. In any staffing system as complex as that required by the United Nations, it is imperative that the process be transparent and fair and include sufficient controls so as to balance the specific mandates established by the governing bodies, the need to promote staff and the need to attract new talent.

7. The staff selection system is based on, inter alia, the need to ensure accountability for the work entrusted to programme managers and on the fact that programme managers can be held accountable for their work only if they are able to select the best talent available. In order to ensure that the process is as transparent as possible, the system includes checks and balances both at the advertisement phase and upon completion of the process through review by the central review bodies. Lists of eligible candidates only are forwarded to the programme managers by the Office of Human Resources Management. The perception that unqualified or non-meritorious candidates are selected over internal staff may arise; however, there are safeguards in place, in the form of the central review bodies, which are specifically tasked with ensuring that the evaluation criteria are properly applied and that no extraneous factors influence the selection decision.

8. Considerable concern has been expressed by both the Office of the Ombudsman and Member States that the shift in responsibility fully to programme managers may have to be reconsidered and that a stronger role be assigned to the Office of the Secretary-General and/or delegated to the Office of Human Resources Management in order to ensure compliance with organizational obligations to meet General Assembly mandates. This issue will be more fully addressed in the report of the Secretary-General on human resources management reform, which will be presented to the General Assembly at its sixty-third session.

9. In paragraph 42 of the report on the activities of the Ombudsman, several issues are raised, including the reduction in functions performed by human resources professionals; lack of staffing resources in the substantive offices; and the

perception of a move from objectivity to subjectivity. It is true that, following the initial screening of candidates by the Office of Human Resources Management for eligibility, programme managers are required to shortlist candidates. However, it is the programme managers — who have the requisite knowledge of their occupational fields — who can best assess the personal history profiles/curricula vitae of individuals with a view to determining which should be interviewed. As to the need for staffing resources, the new system has been in place for several years; if programme managers believe they cannot accomplish such tasks without additional resources, they have the opportunity to address such shortfalls during the biennial budget submission process. Lastly, with regard to the perception that the process is more subjective than in the past, the Department of Management would argue otherwise. As mentioned in paragraph 7 above, it is the role of the central review bodies to provide oversight over the entire process, not just at the end when a candidate is recommended. The Office of Human Resources Management has developed generic job profiles which cover most jobs in the Secretariat and have led to the standardization of language and evaluation criteria, which are immediately available to programme managers. This has ensured that the process is more balanced than in the past and that final decisions are fair and equitable. In addition, the increased use of generic job profiles in developing vacancy announcements has contributed to the enhanced uniformity of requirements contained in vacancy announcements, including the evaluation criteria.

10. Paragraph 43 of the report refers to the system for clearing candidates; absence of substantive input by human resources staff in a large part of the process; and the belief of some staff members that they have been unfairly excluded from the shortlist. There have been issues relating to the timely and appropriate screening and background checking of candidates, particularly in the case of external candidates. This issue is being reviewed by the Office of Human Resources Management, which will be returning to the General Assembly with concrete suggestions for improving the current process, including in the context of the resource implications associated with such proposals. As to the substantive input of the Office of Human Resources Management, the Office continues to perform a variety of functions in the staff selection process, including the preparation of generic job profiles; the review of post classification levels; the pre-screening of candidates for eligibility prior to review by programme managers; the provision of geographical status information (through an indicator in the Galaxy system) to departments/offices indicating when candidates are from unrepresented, underrepresented or overrepresented countries; participation in the central review bodies; and the provision of human resources planning data to department heads, who are responsible for implementing geographical and gender targets. Lastly, on the issue of the perception regarding shortlists and who is included, no organization offers a guarantee to staff that they will always make the shortlist for an interview. The central review bodies do ensure that all internal staff members have been reviewed by the programme manager. The details included in the personal history profile/curriculum vitae, prior knowledge of an internal applicant's skills and information provided by references are all considered when deciding who proceeds to the interview stage. In this regard, the Office of Human Resources Management believes that programme managers who do not select their own staff for a particular shortlist should have the obligation to meet with those staff who are not selected and inform them of the reason for their non-selection and what action they can take to improve their chances when applying

for subsequent vacancies. This issue was raised and agreement reached during the twenty-seventh session of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee.

11. The Secretariat believes that, in order to address the perception of staff members that the selection process is subjective, more communication with staff must be undertaken. In this regard, both the Office of Human Resources Management and the Department of Field Support will ensure that staff members receive adequate and relevant information on the staff selection system. As the report on the activities of the Ombudsman makes clear, if staff are better informed about the process and how they fare in it, many of the perceptions and fears of unfair treatment may be prevented. In this regard, the Office of Human Resources Management believes that a targeted information campaign needs to be developed, particularly in the light of proposed changes being considered with regard to the new talent-management system.

B. Mobility

12. The Office of Human Resources Management fully agrees with the report on the activities of the Ombudsman that communication will be essential to future mobility initiatives. The mobility policy was introduced as an integral part of the staff selection system to support, inter alia, the development of a more versatile, multi-skilled and experienced international civil service and the promotion of greater integration among staff throughout the Secretariat. To date, the first phases of the mobility programme for the P-3/G-7 and P-4/G-6 levels have been completed, with a transparent compendium of available posts. The phase for P-5 and G-5 levels is currently under way. The posts of those staff who have exceeded the five-year post incumbency period are included in the compendiums of posts.

13. There is a reference in paragraph 45 of the report to staff's perception regarding post or functional changes within a particular department or office. Mobility, defined in its broadest sense, includes movement within and between departments, functions, occupational groups, duty stations and organizations of the United Nations system. Within the context of this definition of mobility, within-department moves of staff at the same level are encouraged. Guidelines to this effect have been widely disseminated. Lateral moves enable the learning of new skills sets for staff resulting from substantial changes in function. This type of multi-skilled staff development is the basis of the entire process and allows for staff members to obtain multiple exposures. Even within departments, managers must recognize that information about such opportunities should be shared and that they should be internally advertised, and staff who qualify should be given access to such opportunities. Department heads have the authority to redeploy staff at the same level within the respective department so that they can learn new skills and maintain a certain level of institutional knowledge within the department. The report notes that some programme managers may make exceptions. It is important to note that within the context of the managed reassignment programme, administrative instruction ST/AI/2007/2 provides for exemptions for a staff member to participate in a specific exercise. Such exemptions are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and may be granted for a number of reasons, including situations in which there are valid medical grounds or where the technical requirements or degree of specialization needed for a post cannot be met by other staff participating in the managed reassignment programme. However, these are limited in scope. It is

therefore not within the purview of specific programme managers to exclude anyone from the programme. All such requests must be fully justified and are then decided upon by the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management.

14. Within the mobility programme, the Office of Human Resources Management recognizes that there are perceptions that lateral movement of staff is easier at the larger duty stations and within larger departments. The concerns expressed by staff and managers at the smaller offices continue to be reviewed by the Office of Human Resources Management and the Staff-Management Coordination Committee intersessional working group, and by the Staff-Management Coordination Committee in plenary meeting. Recommendations resulting from a review of the implementation of the mobility policy, including the managed reassignment programme, will be included in a report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its sixty-third and subsequent sessions.

C. Locally recruited staff

15. The perception of a disparity in emoluments between locally recruited and internationally recruited staff in the peacekeeping arena or at any of the main Secretariat duty stations or regional commissions needs to be clarified on a global basis. The establishment of the emoluments packages for locally recruited staff and internationally recruited staff was based on principles set out by the General Assembly. Both the Noblemaire and Flemming principles define the basis for how salaries and emoluments for internationally and locally recruited staff are paid. Those principles and the benefits packages associated with them are reflected in the Staff Regulations adopted by the General Assembly. The perception of inequity by an individual local staff member may be the result of a lack of understanding of the compensation system of the United Nations common system. As the Ombudsman has identified such perceptions as giving rise to recurring complaints among staff at various duty stations, the Office of Human Resources Management and the Department of Field Support believe that greater communication with staff in the field aimed at explaining the two methodologies and the basis for salary setting would probably be useful.

16. The report also identified complaints relating to the inadequacy of medical coverage, the failure to provide reimbursement for the installation of security measures in areas of insecurity, the absence of a similar duty to evacuate in time of crisis as applies to internationally recruited staff, the alleged disparity between the conditions of service of locally recruited peacekeeping personnel and locally recruited staff of the funds and agencies and insufficient training opportunities for locally recruited staff.

17. Issues relating to the security of locally recruited staff in the field have been a cause for concern and are being carefully considered by the Department of Safety and Security, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs on a situation-by-situation basis. Locally recruited staff and their families are included in mission security plans and are relocated within the countries concerned in times of crisis. The number of locally recruited staff in United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions has increased by over 67 per cent over the past few years, rising from 11,389 in 2005 to 19,050 in February 2008.

Familiarizing such large numbers of new staff with United Nations policies and practices has its challenges, which the Departments are working to address.

18. The Department of Field Support established a working group on national staff, which met twice in 2007 to discuss issues of concern to locally recruited staff in peacekeeping and special political missions. The working group consists of representatives of the Department of Field Support, the Office of Human Resources Management, the United Nations Staff Union and staff and management representatives from field missions. The working group was a useful mechanism for understanding and addressing the concerns of local staff and for educating local staff representatives.

19. On the issue of training, locally recruited staff in field missions receive job-related technical training as well as training in computer programs, language training, e-PAS training and access to mandatory e-learning programmes, such as the Integrity Awareness Online Learning Programme, the prevention of workplace harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority online training programme and the security in the field online training programme, and to other organizational learning programmes at the mission level. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 59/296, training outside the mission area is, however, limited to training specifically related to the functions of the post or necessary to the implementation of the mandate. The Departments of Political Affairs, Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support are endeavouring to ensure that individual missions include training for national staff in their annual training programmes and that training be provided for supervisors to help build a common organizational culture among newly recruited managers in the field. Regarding medical insurance, efforts are being made to improve the administration of the medical insurance plan for locally recruited staff in field locations.

20. Regarding the disparity between conditions of service of locally recruited staff of United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions and those of the agencies, funds and programmes, all organizations applying the common system pay the same salaries and allowances as set out in the local scales established by the Office of Human Resources Management and hazard pay as established by the International Civil Service Commission. Regarding compensatory time off and overtime policies, the Secretariat is working with the other organizations of the United Nations common system towards harmonization of practices in the field. However, staff in United Nations peacekeeping operations and special political missions are subject to the staff regulations, rules and policies of the Secretariat.

D. Contractual practices

21. The proposals made by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly (see A/61/861 and A/62/274) were specifically designed to address the current contractual disparity and the resulting concerns of staff both in peacekeeping and other mission settings. The myriad contractual modalities which are currently used by the Secretariat can lead to a situation in which staff working side by side receive different emoluments, benefits and entitlements. This issue is addressed in the proposal of the Secretary-General that is before the General Assembly. The Office of Human Resources Management looks forward to the General Assembly's

decision on this issue, which would go a long way towards reducing or eliminating the concerns of staff in this area.

22. With regard to the Ombudsman's concern about the small number of permanent contracts, the Office of Human Resources Management agrees that continuity of employment for long-serving staff is important. The Secretariat has submitted proposals to the General Assembly which address the need for some type of longer-term contractual loyalty to staff while at the same time giving the Organization the flexibility to ensure it has the right mix of staff at any given time. The proposals of the Secretary-General for streamlining United Nations contractual arrangements (see A/62/274), which are consistent with the International Civil Service Commission's framework, will also go a long way towards alleviating the fears of staff on short-term appointments, which may be renewed on a yearly basis.

E. Special entities established by the United Nations

23. Paragraphs 48 and 49 of the report on the activities of the Ombudsman (A/62/311) do not clarify the status of special entities other than the Special Court for Sierra Leone and the United Nations Assistance to the Khmer Rouge Trials (UNAKRT). The Special Court for Sierra Leone is not a United Nations entity and as such does not fall under the United Nations umbrella with respect to the rights of staff in terms of the application of the United Nations system of administration of justice. The Court developed its own internal mechanism as approved by its management committee. Its staff were not accorded United Nations contracts and are therefore not protected by United Nations regulations and rules and, as it is a non-United Nations body, there is no expectation of such.

24. The case of UNAKRT is different, as each staff member hired by UNAKRT has been appointed under the 200 series of the Staff Rules and its staff have full access to the United Nations system of administration of justice. Likewise, both the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia are subsidiary organs of the Security Council and as such the staff of both Tribunals are appointed under the 100 series of the Staff Rules.

F. Staff welfare

25. Paragraphs 50 and 51 of the report make reference to the need for staff welfare facilities in the more remote sub-offices. The Organization agrees that recreation and welfare facilities are needed in difficult and isolated field locations. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations has developed a welfare policy and missions have begun to request resources for establishing facilities. The Department of Field Support is also working towards establishing minimum standards for building staff accommodation, which will include recreation and welfare facilities. The Secretary-General has also proposed replacing the current occasional recuperation break with paid rest and recuperation travel, which would provide for payment of travel to a designated rest and recuperation location, five days of leave not charged to annual leave and travel time. However, as both the establishment of recreation and welfare activities and the introduction of paid rest and recuperation travel have financial implications, the approval of the General Assembly for those initiatives would be required.

G. Coverage for psychological care

26. Paragraph 52 of the report relates to the issue of psychological coverage under appendix D to the Staff Rules on compensation for service-incurred psychological trauma or other resulting mental problems and to the concern that the current coverage is not sufficient. In this regard, the Human Resources and Finance and Budget Networks of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination have established a joint working group to review appendix D coverage. This item is included in the workplans of both Networks for 2008.

III. Conclusion

27. In conclusion, the Secretary-General recognizes that many of the issues which were included in the report on the activities of the Ombudsman are now either under review internally and will result in proposals to the General Assembly; already before the General Assembly; or in need of further consideration. Furthermore, the Secretary-General intends to ask the Office of the Ombudsman, the Office of Human Resources Management and the Departments of Political Affairs, Peacekeeping Operations and Field Support to intensify their communication strategies with the staff of the entire Organization.
