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Human resources management

Placement of United Nations staff members who have been adversely affected by natural disasters, malicious acts and other critical incidents

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on placement of United Nations staff members who have been adversely affected by natural disasters, malicious acts and other critical incidents ([A/68/483](#)). The Secretary-General states that the report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution [64/260](#), in which the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to address, as a matter of priority, the needs of United Nations staff and their families directly affected by such incidents. During its consideration of the report, the Committee met representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information and clarification, concluding with written responses received on 7 October 2013. **The Advisory Committee notes that the mandate accorded by the General Assembly is not limited only to internationally recruited staff and regrets that broader proposals concerning the needs of all United Nations staff and families affected by such incidents have not been developed.**

2. In the report, the Secretary-General makes a proposal concerning the need to place internationally recruited staff who have been injured or otherwise adversely affected by critical incidents and who consequently are not able to return to their previous function or duty station, but who can continue to successfully contribute to the work of the United Nations ([A/68/483](#), para. 1). The Secretary-General seeks approval to be able, under these exceptional circumstances, to place such staff outside the regular staff selection system laterally into a position in another duty station, mission, office or department, as long as certain conditions are met (*ibid.*, para. 7). The Advisory Committee notes that the current discretionary authority of the Secretary-General to appoint and promote staff outside the established procedures, pursuant to General Assembly resolution [51/226](#), is currently limited to staff in his Executive Office, senior officials at the levels of Under-Secretary-General and Assistant Secretary-General and special envoys (*ibid.*, para. 5).



3. In paragraph 8 of the report, the Secretary-General sets out the proposed criteria for lateral placement in these exceptional circumstances. These include whether a critical incident has occurred and the staff member has been affected by the incident; the staff member has been rendered no longer able or fit to perform certain functions or to continue service at a certain location as a result of the trauma or the critical incident, but would be able to carry out similar functions satisfactorily elsewhere; the staff member meets the qualifications of the new position; and the staff member has been medically cleared to work in the receiving duty station. Only staff holding fixed-term, permanent or continuing appointments would be eligible for exceptional placement.

4. Concerning the number of staff requiring placement under this proposal, the Advisory Committee was informed, upon request, that 24 internationally recruited staff members had been affected by the earthquake in Haiti in 2010 and had required reassignment, as had 20 international staff members and two locally recruited staff members affected by two separate attacks in Afghanistan in October 2010 and April 2011. The Committee was informed that 42 of those 44 staff members had subsequently found other positions through the regular staff system (although, in some cases, doing so had taken up to three years), had been relocated or had separated from the Organization. In four cases, the staff members had returned to their original duty station and were no longer seeking reassignment. Two remaining staff members affected by the incidents in Haiti and Afghanistan were continuing to seek reassignment and would, therefore, be subject to the terms of the current proposal. As to the number of staff members who might in the future be subject to the provisions of the proposal, the Committee was informed that it was difficult to estimate numbers because it was impossible to anticipate where critical incidents were likely to occur.

5. **The Advisory Committee notes that the matter of staff and families affected by critical incidents has been under consideration since the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly. Given that the Assembly, in its resolution 64/260, requested the Secretary-General to address the issue as a matter of priority, it is not clear to the Committee why related proposals were not included in the two overview reports on human resources management reform issues submitted for the consideration of the Assembly at its sixty-fifth and sixty-seventh sessions. The Committee also notes that the number of unresolved cases, as outlined above, is currently minimal and would not appear to justify any amendment to the exceptional placement authority of the Secretary-General set out by the Assembly in its resolution 51/226. Nevertheless, recognizing the particular needs of staff members adversely affected by natural disasters, malicious acts and other critical incidents, the Committee would have no objection to the inclusion of related proposals, if necessary, in the next biennial overview report of the Secretary-General on human resources management reform for the consideration of the Assembly.**

6. The Advisory Committee also points out that the Secretary-General proposes a number of changes to the current recruitment process in his most recent report on staff mobility (A/68/358). The proposal on exceptional placement authority would therefore need to be adjusted on the basis of any possible decision that the General Assembly might take on the issue of staff mobility.

7. With regard to the restricted scope of the current proposal and the broader needs of families of United Nations personnel affected by such incidents, the Advisory Committee notes that the General Assembly previously requested, in paragraph 4 of its resolution 64/260, that the Secretariat should address the needs of such families as a matter of priority. Upon enquiry, the Committee was informed that, in that resolution, the Assembly had approved the establishment of the Emergency Preparedness and Support Team, a dedicated capacity within the Office of Human Resources Management, to provide support and coordinate medical, psychological, welfare and administrative support services to staff members and the families of those who perish or are injured as a result of malicious acts, natural disasters or other emergencies. The Team, which was established in 2010, is, according to the Secretariat, engaged in providing support services to staff members and their families through risk-based preparedness assistance (through training programmes and modules, in addition to prior designation of roles activated during critical incidents), emergency response arrangements and post-emergency support. The Team also administers a recently established memorial and recognition fund, working with eligible survivors to process grants expeditiously. The Committee was also informed that an interdepartmental working group established in 2012 to consider cross-cutting issues involving staff members and families affected by malicious acts and natural disasters had made several recommendations that were being implemented or were currently under consideration within the Secretariat. **The Advisory Committee welcomes the broader efforts of the Secretary-General to address the needs of families of United Nations personnel who are victims of malicious acts, natural disasters and other emergency incidents and requests that detailed information in this regard be included in the next overview report of the Secretary-General on human resources management reform.**

8. **In addition, the General Assembly could request the Secretary-General to broaden the scope of the current proposal beyond United Nations staff members adversely affected by natural disasters, malicious acts and other critical incidents to include those, for example, established cases of individuals suffering from psychological trauma or victims of workplace harassment.**