

OHR (MIS-)MANAGEMENT, II

In this ongoing effort at UN human resources reform, there were clearly strong hopes by Secretary-General Annan and the Secretariat leadership that the UN has indeed entered a new world of tip-top UN managers who can be trusted to implement programmes dynamically, well, and accountably. But there are equal doubts from those who have observed the poor human resources management practices of the UN for the past six decades and are skeptical that they have been, or are being, eradicated by a supposedly newly-vigilant OHRM. This skepticism is indicated *inter alia* by the sets of reservations and cautions that the General Assembly has expressed in its resolutions on OHRM performance over the past half-dozen years.

In an overview analysis in 2003, Dirk Salomons concluded that any prospects for real change in UN personnel management remained rather dim under the heavy pressure of the old pathologies, including the following:

"... after all these years, the United Nations is still struggling to adjust its human resources policies and practices to the reality that surrounds it. ...

In [a highly competitive international] environment, the UN will have to reform its reforms, or go down reforming.

Several dilemmas that have crippled the UN for generations, however, remain unresolved, and this organizational pathology stands in the way of the UN's efforts to remain meaningful. When it comes to managing human resources, the following are [some of] the obstacles that the UN must overcome:

- Its addiction to the trappings of a careers-for-life staffing model, with its emphasis on seniority ...;
- Its fear of offending Member States that exert political pressure -- by not insisting on merit in staffing, even at the highest levels;
- Its reliance on patronage as a survival strategy, especially where outputs are nebulous; ...
- the persistent gap between its perennial promises to improve human resources management and its capacity to deliver; and
- its obsession with cosmetic reforms, hiding the root causes of dysfunctionality.

For most pathologies, there is a cure. For the UN, faith healing will not suffice."

Dirk Salomons, "Good intentions to naught: The pathology of human resources management at the United Nations," in Dennis Dijkzeul, and Yves Beigbeder, eds., Rethinking international organizations: Pathology and promise, Berghahn, New York and Oxford, 2003, pp. 111-139 [136-137]. [emphasis added.]

Even the Secretariat reports noted major cautions. The OIOS report which the General Assembly called for found "significant progress" in a number of initiatives, as the OHRM changes from "an administrative,

oversight function" to a "more strategic, partnering role." OIOS noted that it was collaborating with OHRM in its new assessments and activities, and concluded that:

" ... in order for the reform to reach the next level, its elements should be linked systematically, not just with each other, but also with other [UN} reform initiatives ... Successful implementation ... will depend upon the mutual cooperation between different partners and bodies throughout the Organization in support of a culture of change.

Furthermore, ... OHRM could assume a more strategic role ... [and] should strengthen its ability to measure the impact of its activities on the Organization's performance and, if necessary, to refocus initiatives ..."

"Implementation of all provisions of General Assembly resolution 55/258 on human resources management: Note by the Secretary-General", UN document A/57/726 of **10 February 2003**, "Summary, and paras. 17-26, and 53-55.

The OIOS report further notes that OHRM has moved away from "oversight" to "partnering", not a good thing for a unit with very important oversight and monitoring responsibilities. The OIOS itself is blurring its oversight responsibilities, by helping design and develop the OHRM initiatives which it later must independently assess. Further, the OIOS discussion of new Secretariat staff "selection" processes focuses mostly on computerized systems improvements and problems, not on the "impact" in improving these processes and the "role of the central review bodies" as the General Assembly had specifically requested, and the OIOS found that OHRM still has much to do to sharpen its monitoring work in a results-oriented way.

In the "last word" on human resources management reform, pending the next human resource management reports and new General Assembly resolutions thereon in late 2004 and early 2005, it is noteworthy that the General Assembly placed a renewed strong emphasis on highlighting Secretariat results and accountability . It began by requesting the Secretary-General to ensure that UN staff members "adhere fully" to the approved UN code of conduct, concerning the integrity and independence of the international civil service. It then requested the Secretary-General to:

"4. ... report to the General Assembly [in 2004] in a comprehensive manner on the achievements of the human resources management reform, when sufficient information will be available on the experiences of the Secretariat with ... implementation ...;

5. ... conduct a study [by the OIOS] on the impact of ... [the reforms], in particular on the improvement of recruitment, placement, promotion and training, including an assessment of the role of the central review bodies and mobility ...;

6. ... ensure that all future reports on the implementation of [these] ... reforms focus on the results of such measures;

10. ... ensure the accountability of programme managers in the staff selection process, in close collaboration with the [OHRM], and to report thereon [in 2004];"

"Human resources management," General Assembly resolution 57/305 of **1 May 2003**, Sections I and II.

The US General Accounting Office 2004 report on UN reform efforts launched in 1997 and 2002 to meet UN "core management challenges" -- that is, poor leadership of the Secretariat, duplication among its many offices and programs, and lack of accountability for staff performance -- found that the reforms are not yet complete. Steps had been taken to strengthen UN human capital management, but reforms in this area are ongoing and additional challenges remain, most especially that the UN monitoring and evaluation system does not measure program impact.

The GAO concluded that the reforms still face challenges because the Secretariat does not comprehensively assess reform status and impact; reform agendas lack clearly stated priorities, interim goals, and target dates for completion; there is resistance to change from program managers; and there are possible resource constraints. The GAO recommended that the United States and other member governments encourage the Secretary-General to report regularly on reform status and impact, identify goals and completion dates for remaining reforms, and consider the resulting resource implications.

U.S. General Accounting Office, United Nations: Reforms progressing, but comprehensive assessments needed to measure impact, GAO 04-339, **February, 2004**, "Highlights", and pp. 33-36.

As already discussed in the subsection on The Winner: "Free the Managers" under UN Management Accountability Struggles of this archive, the steady increase in UN managerial discretion and power continues on while their actual accountability disappears in a muddle of stated intentions. The Secretary-General's management reports for 2004 emphasized that the Secretariat leadership is engaged in a "constructive dialogue" with UN managers, seeking to give them ever-greater delegation of authority in their programmes while senior officials provide "strategic policy guidance."

The Department of Management's strategy for 2006-2007 specifically seeks to enhance programme managers' capacity to manage through still more new policies and procedures, measured in part by whether managers are actually "satisfied" with the freedoms being pressed upon them.

"Proposed strategic framework for the period 2006-2007: Part Two: biennial programme plan: Programme 24: Management and support services", UN document A/59/6 (Prog. 24), **19 May 2004**, paras. 24.3-24.9, and page 5. [emphasis added]

In 2004 the new Secretariat reports on human resources reform activities and issues took a similarly benign and pro-management approach. The 2003 interim OIOS report on reform progress, and the resulting General Assembly resolution 57/305 calling firmly for more specific reporting in 2004 on results led not only to the regular biennial report on human resources management reform, but to a further OIOS report on the impact of human resources reform, and other quite

significant policy and operational reports (for which, see the following discussion).

"Implementation of all provisions of General Assembly resolution 55/258 on human resources management: Note by the Secretary-General", UN document A/57/726 of **10 February 2003**, "Summary, and paras. 17-26, and 53-55,.

"Human resources management," General Assembly resolution 57/305 of **1 May 2003**, Sections I and II,

"Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization", UN document A/59/1, **20 August 2004**, para. 235,

"Proposed strategic framework for the period 2006-2007: Programme 24: Management and support services", UN document A/59/6 (Prog. 24), **19 May 2004**, paras. 24.3-24.9, and

"Impact of the human resources management reform: Report by the Secretary-General", UN document A/59/253 of 24 September 2004.

IO Watch eventually will attempt to sort out the interactions, harmonies, contradictions, and cross-claims of these reports, particularly in examining the reaction of the General Assembly, expert bodies, and others to the Secretariat's 2004 "free the managers" expansion attempts. For now, there are several discouraging signs that the Secretariat's human resources management reform continues still to be "just talk" overall, and in the critical accountability areas of performance management, administration of justice, and OHRM monitoring and the code of conduct.

The Secretary-General's 2004 reform report section on the topic of performance management concentrated, as in the past, on actions to install and refine the performance appraisal process over the past half-dozen years. But performance appraisal is actually only one component of performance management. As the US GAO emphasized in its 2004 in-depth report on all the UN reform initiatives now "in place" or under development:

"... the outputs of many reforms, such as developing a written plan or establishing a new office, are only the first step in achieving the Secretary General's overall reform goals. ... departments and offices in the Secretariat are still institutionalizing these new plans to improve U.N. operations in the long term."

U.S. General Accounting Office, United Nations: Reforms progressing, but comprehensive assessments needed to measure impact, GAO 04-339, **February 2004**, p. 8,.

[emphasis added]

Similarly, Mr. Annan's report section on "Next steps" for the key "building blocks" of reform -- in this case improving the administration of justice -- was a resounding disappointment, informing the reader simply, vaguely, and quite unhelpfully only that:

"J. Administration of justice

The administration of justice is considered as a separate item in the agenda of the General Assembly."

"Human resources management reform: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/59/263 of **13 August 2004**, p. 35.

The General Assembly had emphasized very firmly in its May 2003 resolution 57/305 that the Secretary-General ensure that the UN staff "adhere fully" to the UN code of conduct of 1998. The Secretariat's actions on OHRM monitoring activities in 2004, however, still seem to be very "soft". This unfortunate situation is discussed more fully under the subsection on OHRM monitoring efforts which follows.

These reform reports were joined by a series of other reports relating to human resources management which, it seems fair to say, concern "life or death" issues for future UN operations. They present both major policy proposals and actions already underway or proposed for a fundamental reshaping of the UN and the international civil service. They include the following documents, with more sure to follow.

"Contractual arrangements: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/59/263/Add. 1 of **9 September 2004**,

"Comprehensive report on the staffing of field missions, including the use of 300 and 400 series appointments: Report of the Secretary-General, UN document A/59/291 of **23 August 2004**,

(for which see also General Assembly resolution 58/296, "Administrative and budgetary aspects of the financing of United Nations peacekeeping operations" of **22 July 2004**),

"Report of [the OIOS] on the audit of policies and procedures for recruiting Department of Peacekeeping Operations staff: Note by the Secretary-General", UN document A/58/704 of **6 February 2004**,

"Follow-up audit of the policies and procedures of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations for recruiting international civilian staff for field missions: Note by the Secretary-General", UN document A/59/152 of **15 July 2004**,

"Consultants and individual contractors: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/59/217 of **6 August 2004**, and

"Outsourcing practices: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/59/227 of **11 August 2004**.

This flood of Secretariat reports, summarizing actions very much under way and pressing hard for decisive further action, exposes enormous tensions about future UN operations. The decisions being presently taken could be the salvation of UN operations or their downfall, with the actual outcome still very much in doubt. IO Watch wishes to note four critical components of this central debate, as discussed throughout this archive.

FIRST, the UN has very entrenched habits (of six decades) as a slow-moving set of headquarters bureaucracies, involved with conferences, meetings, and research work that grind along ever so slowly.

SECOND, the UN is experiencing a new wave of peacekeeping demands (in all its facets). There are many major difficulties, as discussed in the sections of this archive on UN Performance Problems, in the Security Council, peacekeeping, humanitarian, nation-building and human

rights areas. The Secretariat now seeks to staff these urgent missions with outstanding, dynamic, and highly-skilled staff, in competition with many other (including UN system) organizations. These people should be ready to jump rapidly to field assignments of all kinds around the world (often without families), to work in ever-more dangerous field situations, to do so on shorter-term contracts with more aggressive termination policies, and with compensation packages that are not tip-top (especially considering the conditions-of-service demands made.)

THIRD, Secretary-General Annan believes that his efforts of the past decade to "free the managers" are bringing significant change in the bumbling UN management culture. But the two key processes that would permit the UN headquarters bureaucrats to meld smoothly with the dynamic new field staff experts are the protections provided by management accountability and the rule of law. This entire archive underlines that these essential processes have not appeared. In fact, the "unleashed" managers are only undermining essential management accountability and the rule of law.

The gathering storm clouds were evidenced by the results of the UN's Integrity Survey of its staff of June 2004:

"A new survey of ... [UN integrity perceptions has found that] while structures for reporting and combating corruption exist, most staff members are either unaware of how to use them or afraid to do so for fear of high-level retaliation.

'The UN has a 'phone book' of rules and regulations which are totally useless as they are never practiced', a staff member is quoted as saying ... [Another says,] 'Senior leaders caught in serious breaches of ethics should be punished, not promoted as usual.'

... [The study] is being made public at a time when Secretary-General Kofi Annan has been forced by the widespread publicity [about corruption in the Iraq oil-for-food program] to appoint a high-level panel to look into [it] ...

The new study records relatively high levels of worker satisfaction ..., but its most negative findings have to do with ingrown leadership and the lack of response to reports of corruption.

'Get rid of the old boy network,' one staff member ... [says.] 'That network is wide, tenacious and powerful. ... So long as you can wind your way into that network, you are OK. ... Opposing the network is certainly the end of a UN career.'"

Warren Hoge, "Report criticizes the way UN fights corruption", International Herald Tribune, **June 16, 2004**. [Note: The actual survey is "United Nations organizational integrity survey", Final Report, prepared by Deloitte Consulting LLP, **June 2004**. It can be found at

<http://www.un.org/News/oss/sg/index.shtml> .]

FOURTH and finally, the current UN human resources debate and challenges occur not in the "little" UN Secretariat, which generally presents itself as a modest group of some 9,000 staff. Two 2004 status reports indicate a much more complex (but still apparently incomplete) picture of the actual scope of UN operations, against which the above drastic human resource reforms are playing out:

"The demand for United Nations peacekeeping operations increased dramatically during the past year, and new operations were launched in Burundi, Haiti, Liberia and the Sudan. At present, more than 56,000 uniformed personnel and some 11,000 civilian staff from 97 countries are serving in 16 missions around the world. Many of those operations are multidimensional, dealing not only with security issues, but also with political problems, the rule of law, human rights, humanitarian concerns, and economic reconstruction. [This expansion] ... places enormous strain on the Organization's resources and its capacity to plan, deploy and manage those operations. Today's operations will not succeed without the sustained political support and commitment of the Member States -- and the right resources."

"Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization", UN document A/59/1, **20 August 2004**, para. 8. [emphasis added]

"As of 30 June 2004, the total number of staff of the UN Secretariat and special status units] ... holding appointments of one year of more amounted to **37,598**. Of that total, **14,823** paid from various sources of funding are assigned to the Secretariat and **22,375** are assigned to other entities of the United Nations."

"Composition of the Secretariat: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/59/299 of **26 August 2004**, para. 11. [emphasis added]

In December 2004 the General Assembly reacted with surprising swiftness to the Secretary-General's many 2004 reports (it often issues its resolutions on management reform matters only the next spring). Its latest resolution was a mixture of the good, the usual, and the tired and repetitive. On the "good" side, the Assembly:

- raised sharp questions about the ambitious new mobility programme;
- urged that proper staff-management consultations be reestablished;
- raised pointed questions about recruitment problems and issues (including staff participation in central review bodies for staff selection);
- postponed consideration on contractual issues pending ICSC input;
- and raised pointed questions about field staffing and contractor use and employment of retired staff.

"Human resources management: Report of the Fifth Committee", UN document A/59/650 of **22 December 2004**, and

"Human resources management", General Assembly resolution 59/266 of **23 December 2004**.

On the routine side, the Assembly reflected and exhorted on the regular ongoing topics of competitive exams, geographic distribution, and gender representation. However, in the most important area -- human resources management reform -- the Assembly was largely and regrettably just "tired and repetitive."

In its lead section on human resources management reform the Assembly resolution reaffirmed its many past resolutions and

exhortations, often verbatim, to the Secretary-General to finally establish a proper system of accountability and sanctions for misperforming managers, and to report on progress made and results. Succinctly and specifically, it concluded by recalling the requests in its resolutions 51/226, 53/221, and 57/305 (at its 1996, 1998, and 2002 sessions):

"to enhance managerial accountability with respect to human resources management decisions, including imposing sanctions in cases of demonstrated mismanagement of staff and willful neglect of, or disregard for, established rules and procedures, while safeguarding the right of due process of all staff members, including managers, and requests the Secretary-General to report comprehensively thereon at its sixty-first session."

"Human resources management: Report of the Fifth Committee", UN document A/59/650 of **22 December 2004**, and

"Human resources management", General Assembly resolution 59/266 of **23 December 2004**, section I and esp. para. 14.

The one new phrase added at the end of this decade-long exhortation by the General Assembly to the Secretariat to apply real management accountability could at least be significant, as it requested a specific, comprehensive report on this management accountability and sanctions topic.

Unfortunately, the Assembly scheduled this report, as is the usual ponderous practice, for two years hence (in late 2006), certainly not as the "unwelcome guest" during the promises, exhortations, rededications, and celebrations of the UN's sixtieth anniversary in the autumn of 2005.

But by 2006, the scandals in the UN-administered oil-for-food programme, and all the other management problems plaguing the Secretariat (see Where is the Rule of Law? and Other Major Problems) may have dragged the Secretariat into a morass of lost credibility, without the General Assembly ever having become meaningfully involved. This is a very shameful failure of UN governance.

The grave, entrenched flaws of OHRM as an instrument to enhance management accountability and ensure due process for staff are illustrated by two quite recent and damaging quotes:

"Rosemarie Waters, [the UN Staff Union President], said that ... **in the last six years, [UN] ... management had been reforming itself and increasing managerial authority, while reducing accountability.** The Staff Union [had great respect for the Secretary-General's vision and reform programme goals.] ... It could not support, however, the erosion of staff rights and dissolution of oversight mechanisms as a means of implementation, [or legitimize] ... actions in which staff, through their elected representatives, had no meaningful role to play. ...

The [integrity survey] ... revealed that staff ... feared reprisals for exposing breaches of ethics, and they perceived that the disciplinary process was applied unevenly. Their view of integrity among senior managers was less than positive..

The Organization had yet to establish concrete measures for individual accountability, she continued. It was essential that areas with expanded delegation of authority for personnel decisions should be carefully examined and, if abuses were found, such delegation should be revoked. ... **The [OHRM] had informed staff representatives of its inability to enforce accountability because they lacked central authority.** The Fifth Committee may wish to recommend that concrete individual accountability be developed, in consultation with staff representatives, on a priority basis."

"UN staff committee representatives tell budget committee concerns ignored in management reform report", Fifth Committee, Press Release GA/AB/3641 of **29 October 2004**, pp. 2-3.
[emphasis added]

" ... When I worked in Liberia in the mid-Nineties a new [UN] chief administrative officer ... [arrived and moved aggressively] for a 15 percent kickback on everything we purchased.

[He also tried to force many] ... of his young 'local staff' to sleep with him ...

I was the human rights lawyer and these girls would come to my office in tears asking for help. I wrote memo after memo of complaint to my chain of command, but no one ever did anything. **When I visited the UN [personnel] office in New York to complain personally, they laughed at my naïve outrage: 'It happens all the time in the field', they said. 'There's nothing we can do.'** ...

That CAO had been knocking around West Africa for years, always mired in corruption, never disciplined ... - during which time the head of personnel was Kofi Annan. [The CAO] ... was eventually indicted by US federal prosecutors in New York for \$1.5 million of fraudulent kickbacks ... He has since died.]

What kind of leadership would tolerate this conduct 10 years ago? ... Precisely the same leadership that [has now] ... permitted the oil-for-food scandal and the sex-for-food scandal.

Kenneth Cain, "How many more must die before Kofi quits?", The Observer (UK), **April 2, 2005**.

[Note: Mr. Cain is a former UN human rights lawyer who served in U.N. peacekeeping operations in Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti and Liberia.]

Meanwhile, UN life meanders on. The remaining parts of this subsection briefly explore whether the over-tasked and under-motivated OHRM (and the UN overall) can indeed enforce accountability of these thousands and thousands of employees scattered worldwide, and also overcome its long-entrenched operating problems. As all the verbiage about grand new strategies and reforms in 2004 and 2005 is gradually analyzed and dissected, the subsections which follow will be considerably updated:

- clarifying, and streamlining staff rules and procedures;
- staff performance ratings as part of performance management;
- combating harassment;
- firmly establishing a career development system;
- developing essential support services to maintain and enhance the organization's staff resources;
- ambitious new mobility policies to rotate staff worldwide; and
- the all-important role of OHRM in establishing, monitoring and enforcing the requisite accountability (which the Secretariat itself finally and bluntly admitted in May 2005

is "insufficient and must be significantly enhanced" (see [Monitoring.](#))