

## CAREER DEVELOPMENT

The lackluster reform of basic UN human resources management responsibilities over the decades is well illustrated by a perpetually-delayed career development system for UN staff.

Based on recommendations made in 1971, the UN Secretariat finally promised the General Assembly in 1978 that it would develop a career development system for staff, who have in fact endured, and still suffer, decades of budget freezes, staff cuts, hiring freezes, and micro-management attempts by Member States.

Report of the Joint Inspection Unit on personnel problems in the United Nations: Report of the Secretary-General", A/8454, Parts I and II, of **5 October 1971**, pp. 20-24 and 101-166, and II, paras. 365-394.

"Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of personnel policy reforms", A/C.5/33/2 of **17 September 1978**.

In 1983, the then Office of Personnel Services developed a very extensive draft plan and system design for a career development system, but the initiative gradually faded away. Much later, in 1989, the General Assembly urged again that this central task be completed to ensure fair treatment and recognize staff merit.

"Personnel questions", General Assembly resolution 44/185 of **19 December 1989**, Part A., para. 7.

In 1992, the Secretariat hired expert consultants who prepared a report on a career development system. The Secretary-General then presented a lengthy report to the General Assembly. It detailed the concept and scope of career development, the elements of an integrated system, and outlined an implementation plan with pilot projects and resource requirements. This sounded promising, but the report was notable mainly for its extreme complacency about this high-priority management need. It stated smugly, in light of the sorry past history sketched above, that:

"Efforts toward the establishment of an effective career development system for the Secretariat staff have been going on for sometime, an indication that the Administration strongly holds the view that career development is an indispensable strategy for the effective management of the most important resources of the Organization ... the staff. A landmark ... was the issuance of [a 1978 bulletin] ... in which the Secretary-General announced the intention of establishing such a system.

Despite ... a great amount of work done on [a number of tasks], it was clear that

a fully functioning ... system was not in place, leading to the need to review the concept ... and to redirect the efforts as necessary. Drawing on ... consultations and fully cognizant of the realities within which the Organization operates, it was considered necessary to recast the whole concept of career development if a viable career development system was to be established. Accordingly, the ... [elements] ... outlined in the present report are part of this process."

"Career development at the United Nations: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/C.5/47/6 of **25 August 1992**, paras. 4-5.

Despite these pious pronouncements, the issue again languished. The Assembly pushed once again for action in 1993, but the momentum disappeared in another fog of Secretariat conceptual discussions. Another half-decade passed. Then, in a 1999 interview, Secretary-General Annan mentioned that:

"[Q] As ASG for Personnel in 1986, you stressed in *UN Special* that career development was crucial. You reiterated this in our columns two years ago as Secretary-General. Nothing seems to have changed though. Why?

[A] ... Personnel is working on a plan, and I expect this plan to have specific details on career development."

Personnel questions", General Assembly resolution 47/226 of **30 April 1993**, Section I.B, "Career development".

"Human resource management policies: Report of the Secretary-General", A/49/445 of **29 September 1994**, para. 4,

"A strategy for the management of human resources of the Organization", A/C.5/49/5, **1994**, paras. 1-20, and

"A messenger of peace in a messy world", *UN Special*, **February 1999**, pp. 9-10.

Several more years passed, but in 2002 there was indeed some promising news (although those who might have been awaiting a career development system for two or three decades clearly would no longer need it.) The Secretary-General finally reported that a comprehensive career development system (or at least a structure therefore) had been put into place, with a policy, concepts, special programs for junior staff, some workshops, a Career Support Guide, and generic job profiles. He stated that future efforts will seek to build more systematic "success planning" and career information and "enhancement" of the above programmes, and greater attention to the needs of General Service staff.

"Human resources management reform: Report of the Secretary-General," UN document A/57/293 of **8 August 2002**, paras. 55-61.

One can only hope for three things:

-- first, that the comprehensive system in place will not be an empty shell of grand policies but no decisive actions, like the management accountability system of the 1990s;

-- second, that it will not take three decades to fully implement this new system, as it took to design it; and

-- third, that the Secretariat will report much more specifically, analytically, and publicly in the future on actual progress made in implementing the new career development system, and systematically assessing its results, impact, and ongoing improvements needed.