

# ANNUAL RESULTS REPORTING TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Two decades ago (all analyses of remedies for dealing with accountability and rule-of-law problems in the UN seem to begin with that "xx decades ago" phrase) the UN's then-top manager made an excellent and admirably succinct statement of what the UN Secretariat needed to do to meet the decision-making needs of a very unhappy set of Member States in the Fifth Committee:

"Member States have ... stressed the need to be told, more clearly and more extensively ... what has been the programmatic performance of the Secretariat, which outputs have been delivered, and with which result....

Let us strengthen the monitoring and evaluation functions ...

Let us say clearly and dispassionately what has been done and with which result, and equally what has not been done and why....

Let us produce more analytical performance reports ....

I find the essential problem one of better and more transparent information, thus permitting better decisions."

"Statement", Response to criticisms by UN Under-Secretary-General for Management Patricio Ruedas, **12 November 1985**, as quoted in UN Joint Inspection Unit, "Reporting on the Performance and Results of United Nations Programmes: Monitoring, evaluation and management review components", UN document A/43/124,1988, p. 3.

Yet a 1989 summary assessment made by *The Economist* found precious little change, and is still directly relevant:

"The crude truth about many of the UN agencies is that they don't know what they are trying to achieve; and that cronyism, sloth and incompetence would ensure they could not achieve it even if they did. The obstacles to reform are huge, the courage to tackle them nowhere visible. Still, here are some suggestions.

The system reflects the whims and false starts of 44 years ... some parts should be radically slimmed or closed entirely.

Other parts are paralysed by having too many separate aims, too many programmes .... Each should be given a manageable set of objectives and focused on these.

**Accountability must be improved. That would at least mean regular and public reports on where and how the money goes, and on how far pre-stated targets of achievement are being met "**

"The United Nations agencies: A case for emergency treatment", The Economist, **December 2, 1989**, pp. 27-28, 30 [30]. [emphasis added]

[Note: the article offered a set of sensible suggestions for improvement as of 1989. At present, most if not almost all still seem to have been ignored.]

In the year 2000, a pivotal series of reports appeared, which illustrate that the UN Secretariat is still "accountability-challenged" when it comes to transparent performance reporting. First, a very detailed and expert assessment of the Secretary-General's reform plan was issued by the United States General Accounting Office in May 2000. The GAO observed that:

"In recent years, the United Nations has had fundamental problems. In 1994 ... there was an overall failure of its human resources system to staff critical posts with the right people. ...

"[In 1997] The Secretary General proposed a reform program consisting of three [integrated] core elements: (1) restructuring U.N. leadership and operations; (2) developing a performance-based human capital system; and (3) introducing programming and budgeting processes based on results. ... [He] set the end of 1999 as the target to put the reforms in place. ...

The United Nations has substantially restructured its leadership and operations and partly implemented a merit-based and performance-oriented human capital system ... However, ... the overall objectives of the reform have not yet been achieved. Specifically, the United Nations has not yet implemented reforms to focus its programming and budgeting on managing the Secretariat's performance. These initiatives would enable Member States to hold the Secretariat accountable for results and are key to the success of the overall reform because they institutionalize a shift in the organization's focus from carrying out activities to accomplishing missions. ... the U.N. reform is an interrelated process and requires that all core elements be in place to succeed."

"US General Accounting Office, "United Nations: Reforms are progressing, but overall objectives have not been achieved", GAO/NSIAD-00-169, 15 pages, of **May 10, 2000**, especially summary and pp. 2-3 and 9-15, and "United Nations: Reform initiatives have strengthened operations, but overall objectives have not been achieved", GAO/NSIAD-00-150, **May 10, 2000**, 84 pages. [emphasis added]

Notwithstanding this negative assessment, in August 2000, Secretary-General Annan summarized the status of accountability and responsibility reform actions since 1994, and -- quite abruptly -- declared "victory":

"In conclusion, the Secretary-General is confident that the comprehensive system of accountability now in place ensures that accountability mechanisms are effectively used, are seen to be used, and ensure that staff at all levels are held accountable for their actions and inaction."

"Accountability and responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General", A/55/270 of **3 August 2000**, Summary, paras. 1-2, 47-48. [emphasis added.]

Unfortunately, this report ignored its own Annexes, the first of which identified four clear "steps to ensuring accountability," of which the UN -- at that time and arguably ever since -- has only done perhaps one or one-and-a-half. The Secretariat has never given the General Assembly any systematic report on the most critical steps, 3 and 4 below:

- " 1. Specifying responsibility, authority and results to be achieved
2. Providing guidance and support
3. Monitoring and assessing the exercise of responsibility and authority
4. Taking appropriate action

Follow-up must be capable of distinguishing between and dealing appropriately with the following:

- (a) Excellent or satisfactory execution of responsibility and authority;
- (b) Unsatisfactory execution of responsibility and authority as a result of carelessness or ignorance;
- (c) Unacceptable exercise of responsibility and authority due to deliberate flouting of policies, rules and regulations, or exceeding the limits of authority.
- (d) Misconduct or fraud."

"Accountability and responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General", A/55/270 of **3 August 2000**, Annex I, "Four steps to ensuring accountability."

[emphasis added.]

[Note: Annex II, "The chain of accountability," is equally informative in detailing all the mechanisms which must be in place (and fully functioning), as they are not in the UN Secretariat]

An emphatic and substantive further rebuttal to Secretary-General Annan's declaration that accountability mechanisms were then in place and being effectively used came only a month later. An article on the work of his own OIOS stated that:

"The United Nations has been hit by an unprecedented wave of fraud, waste and corruption. Officials at its antifraud investigation unit say they are expecting to have to run more than 350 inquiries by the end of the year -- nearly twice the total for 1998, and a 50 per cent increase on last year. Thousands of staff, contractors, and consultants have been interviewed in scores of countries. ...

The revelations will embarrass Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, who is to welcome national leaders ... to the 'Millennium Summit' in New York next week. ... Annan is hoping to convince skeptical heads of state that the UN has provided value for money and that its role should be expanded. ...

One senior investigator said last week that the UN investigations unit's workload was greater than ever. "We are seeing more and more frauds and abuses of authority. ...

The OIOS's annual report, due out next month, will reveal cases of sloppy management, lax enforcement, harassment and outright criminality. ... OIOS is working with dozens of international police forces -- including Scotland Yard -- on inquiries into the activities of UN personnel."

Jason Burke, et. al., "UN rocked by flood of fraud cases: Officials were 'addicted to luxury,'" The Observer International (UK), **September 3, 2000**.

[Note: any such interviews with OIOS staff seem to have come to an abrupt end thereafter, and subsequent OIOS reports on fraud, mismanagement, and its own investigation activities have become so subdued as to almost disappear.]

Again, however, Mr. Annan forged ahead in 2002 with more dynamic reforms as part of his "agenda for further change", to take place in a "phased approach" which continues on. However, the General Assembly, which had appeared to tire of protesting a decade of "will soon" and "could be" reports after its call for UN management accountability of 1993, is now making a renewed effort to emphasize results and accountability. It stated in its

2003 resolution on Mr. Annan's new initiatives that he should:

"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**, Section II. [emphasis added.]

The Secretariat biennial reports on reforms for 2004 remain to be seen and assessed. However, the US GAO issued another timely report on these matters in February 2004. Its summary suggests that chances for UN performance management and reporting implementation remain elusive, always dangling elusively somewhere out there in the foggy future:

Why GAO did this study

The U.N. Secretary General launched two reform agendas, in 1997 and 2002, to address the U.N.'s core management challenges -- poor leadership of the Secretariat, duplication among its many offices and programs, and the lack of accountability for staff performance. ... In 2000, GAO reported that the reforms were not yet complete.

What GAO found

... First, the Secretariat has taken positive steps to strengthen its human capital management, but reforms in this area are ongoing and additional challenges remain. Second, the U.N. has begun to adopt results-oriented budgeting, but its monitoring and evaluation system does not measure program impact. ...

UN reform faces several challenges. For example, the Secretariat does not conduct comprehensive assessments of the status and impact of U.N. reforms. In addition, the reform agendas lack clearly stated priorities, interim goals, and target dates for overall completion. **Other challenges include resistance to change from program managers and possible resource constraints.**

What GAO recommends

... the [US] Secretary of State and [US Mission to the UN] should work with other member states to encourage the Secretary-General to (1) report regularly on the status and impact of reforms; (2) identify short- and long-term goals and establish target end dates for remaining reforms; and (3) conduct assessments of 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" page. [emphasis added]

[Note: the complete report is available at [www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-339](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-339) , and see again the GAO's report of May 10, 2000 cited above.]

In a section on "Various factors may impede full implementation of U.N. reforms," the GAO first cited the lack of

systematic Secretariat follow-up on the reforms to assess how they are working, and the lack of time frames or milestones for completion of reform actions. The report then elaborated on managerial non-cooperation and a lack of resources committed to realizing the reforms, and the elusive "solution" proposed by the Secretariat:

"Third, according to [UN] ... officials, some program managers and staff have resisted implementing certain reform initiatives. ... OIOS reported that about half of program managers across the Secretariat have not complied with U.N. regulations to monitor and evaluate the performance of program activities ... [and that] The Secretariat lacks clear rules and procedures for conducting [such] ... exercises. ... Some managers also stated that they lacked resources to support this work and were concerned that these evaluation requirements would detract time and money from their regular work responsibilities. ...

Fourth, U.N. officials stated that they have encountered delays in implementing reforms due to a lack of available regular budget resources. ... The Secretary General stated that departments would need to implement reforms with existing resources because additional funding would not be available ..."

U.S. General Accounting Office, United Nations: Reforms progressing, but comprehensive assessments needed to measure impact, GAO 04-339, **February, 2004**, page 35. [emphasis added.]

The GAO learned that the UN was working on the problem, and a performance reporting system could be expected soon -- well, actually only in 2006:

"In 2002, the ... [OIOS] found that program managers and department and office heads were not complying with U.N. regulations. ... nearly half of program managers were not regularly monitoring and evaluating program performance. In addition, program managers were not held accountable for meeting program objectives because U.N. regulations prevent linking program effectiveness and impact with program managers' performance. U.N. officials told us that a more mature program monitoring and evaluation system is needed before program managers can be held responsible for program performance.

We found that there were a variety of problems ... Most programs do not have comprehensive monitoring and evaluation plans ... managers ... did not directly review ... [evaluation results] in [more than half of the] programmes surveyed in 2001 ... overall, evaluation findings were not used ...

The Secretary-General tasked the ... OIOS to develop a strategy to systematically evaluate and monitor programme results and to introduce information systems needed ... and expects to have a complete system by 2006."

U. S. General Accounting Office, United Nations: Reforms progressing, but comprehensive assessments needed to measure impact, GAO 04-339, **February 2004**, pp. 19-23 [22-23].

The GAO then recommended, as had the General Assembly in May 2003, that Member States should encourage reporting on reform status and impact, and observed that overcoming managers' resistance was critical to this process:

"To promote full implementation and accountability of the Secretary General's overall

reform actions, we recommend that the Secretary of State [and the US Mission to the UN] work with other member states to encourage the Secretary General to

- Report regularly through an existing U.N. reporting mechanism on the status and impact of the 1997 and 2002 reforms and other reforms that may follow ..."

"[Because of managers' resistance, and the lack of guidance and resources for implementing the reforms] ... the Secretariat is providing training to all departments to assist managers and staff in conducting self-monitoring and evaluation exercises to comply with performance-oriented budgeting and overcome resistance. Managers' support is critical for the institutionalization of reforms 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**, pp. 36, 35.

IO Watch believes that this process is like a "greased-pig contest", in which the General Assembly can never quite grab hold of a real UN performance management system. In fact, UN managers have consistently obstructed establishment of the system. Even today, UN senior officials still say, with a straight face -- and after 40 years of 'effort', that a "more mature" monitoring system is needed, and that managers who do not use evaluation tools indeed cannot be held accountable because UN regulations prevent it. Thus the process of UN performance management is postponed once again, until 2006. Where's the accountability?

[Note: this whole lengthy and abortive history is discussed in the subsection of this archive on Programme planning system (PPBE). ]

By *fait accompli* and dereliction of duty, IO Watch believes that any hope for proper UN performance management reporting and accountability, and reporting thereon, seems a lost cause for at least several more years. However, at least the General Assembly now seems ready to insist on the important first step of establishing serious annual progress reporting on overall management reforms, as first indicated by an annoyed 1998 ACABQ report (and now reaffirmed by the General Assembly resolution of 2003), namely that the Secretariat should:

" ... set aside a preoccupation with concept and theory ... to concentrate on ... specific new measures to increase the efficiency and confirm the results arising out of the implementation of new measures as well as those initiated prior to the current exercise."

"Advisory Committee rejects 'non-programme costs' report", International Documents Review, **16 March 1998**, page 5.

To deal firmly with the perpetual Secretariat evasiveness, a sound proposal already exists, and is now needed more than ever. In their excellent and still highly-relevant report on *Renewing the United Nations system* in 1994, Erskine Childers and Brian Urquhart proposed very specifically that:

"Recommendations for the process of reform

1. Governments must be far more conscious that many weaknesses in the UN system can only be corrected by improving the quality of the people they appoint to lead it. ...

8. The General Assembly should adopt a standard discipline that *before* voting on *any reform* package it will obtain **an independent "Reform Impact Report."** This report should recall the weaknesses that were to be addressed, and advise the Assembly to what extent the negotiated reform will meet them; where it will not do so; and any serious lacunae in it. ...

9. The ACABQ should be requested to maintain *a fully comprehensive data bank* of all significant reform and restructuring decisions by the Secretary-General and/or the General Assembly since 1960 ... in computer memory, accessible to Delegations and the public. The data bank should *also store mandatory follow-up reports.*

10. **Annually** for three] ... years following any [reform decision] the ACABQ should **report on implementation to the General Assembly,** clearly identifying ... [delays, causes, responsibilities, and adjustments] ...

11. ... not more than five years *after a significant reform* ... the ACABQ should **commission an independent evaluation of its impact,** with recommendations."

Erskine Childers, with Brian Urquhart, in Chapter X, "The international civil service", in "Renewing the United Nations System", *Development Dialogue*, 1994:1, Dag Hammarskjold Foundation, Uppsala, Sweden, 1994, pp. 188-189. [emphasis added.]

After a decade of failed attempts to install UN management accountability reforms, and numerous other reforms relentlessly underway, action on this recommendation is essential and long, long overdue. Unexamined UN reforms can do much damage: **As the strong and specific emphases of the above Childers and Urquhart recommendations make clear, to permit UN reforms to proceed relentlessly without independent expert analysis and assessment, and adjustment, is a grave governance failure.**

IO Watch would suggest that oversight and use of this critical process be entrusted to **the General Assembly audit subcommittee proposed above** in this "Answers" subsection. It would finally create an expert body directly concerned with the central issues of outputs, results, and Secretariat performance, to at last balance the input-oriented ACABQ. Particularly if this new subcommittee is composed of members (and staff) who are professional management auditors, and works closely with the Board of Auditors and the OIOS, it **could be the center of a critically-needed process of knowledgeable UN oversight and regular independent reform assessment, performance reporting, and follow-up.**

In the battle for UN management accountability, game and set have gone to the Secretariat, but it is definitely time for the General Assembly to rally and exercise full "due diligence" to win the match. The Assembly could thereby accept, as it does not at present, "accountability for accountability", and fulfill its oversight responsibilities to Member States, taxpayers, and

the people of the world who rely on (or at least still hope for) effective UN services and programmes.