

OTHER MAJOR PROBLEMS

SUBSECTION TABLE OF CONTENTS

Manager/investigators?

Suppressed whistle-blowers

Top corruption fighter corrupted

UN Convention Against Corruption

"The UNCTAD one"

"Poor little UN"

Global Compact hypocrisy

Grand lack of focus

Iraq oil-for-food programme

Iraq oil-for-food programme, II

Baghdad headquarters bombing

UN coordination of tsunami aid?

UN coordination of tsunami aid?, II

Worst of all, never-ending genocides

The preceding major sections of this IO Watch archive have discussed the UN weak management culture and the many performance problems which have arisen and continue in all areas of UN operations. The major underlying problems are: the defective old UN "diplo/management" culture; the failure to establish and apply the management accountability resolution of 1993 and to build effective internal management systems; the weaknesses of the new OIOS internal oversight unit and the continuing inadequate external oversight mechanisms; and above all, the absence of the rule of law in UN operations at a time when managers have been "freed" as never before.

UN oversight, transparency, and accountability problems thus seem more severe than ever before, but they are still shutting out the "sunshine" of basic oversight and scrutiny that might lead to their much-needed reform.

In 2001 UN Assistant-Secretary-General Michael Doyle explained in an interview that multinational companies participate in the UN Global Compact initiative as a foundation for a learning network where they can share "best practices". He judged that "One year in, we've seen the companies building the kinds of practical and intellectual bridges we [the UN] was hoping for." He explained further that once companies make their commitments to observe the Compact principles, and have chosen their methods of carrying them out,

"they engage in an open dialogue on how they were doing so ... [and] *are subjected to critiques -- by their own employees as well as outsiders including human rights and environmental groups and labor unions.*"

Irwin Arieff, "Some 300 firms sign up for global compact", Reuters, **July 28, 2001.** [emphasis added.]

A look at some further and current severe UN accountability and operating problems is particularly relevant in light of the results of the UN survey of 6,000 of its own employees released in June 2004. That survey not only criticized the "ingrown" UN leadership and its lack of response to reports of corruption, but largely turned a survey intended to deal with matters of integrity into its opposite, unease and complaints about the lack of accountability within the UN, particularly among the managerial class:

"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 them. ...

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 is interesting

to compare this 2004 survey with a very similar one done in 1995, which shows that things have indeed gone downhill -- staff in both surveys sought greater accountability, but in 2004 they are much more suspicious of the actions of senior managers.]

This subsection therefore goes beyond the rule-of-law deficiencies, ongoing programme performance problems, management accountability struggles, and oversight flaws already discussed to identify some additional, relatively severe, UN scandals or very dubious situations that presently exist. It does so in the spirit of encouraging much more dialogue and critiques of "how the UN is doing" as Mr. Doyle suggested. They include a set of what IO Watch considers "mosts":

- most reckless: Manager/investigators ;
- most damaging: Suppressed whistle-blowers ;
- most embarrassing: Top corruption fighter corrupted (or is it maybe two?);
- most hypocritical: a tie, between UN Global Compact hypocrisy and the UN Convention Against Corruption ;
- most scandal-ridden: Iraq oil-for-food programme ;
- most deadly mismanagement incident: Baghdad headquarters bombing ;
- most current central accountability and performance test, UN coordination of tsunami aid ; and
- most tragic and appalling: Worst of all, never-ending genocides .

The topics discussed all serve to indicate how much work remains to be done to achieve real management accountability in the UN. Each subsection which follows represents an open-ended, on-going problem. Each could be the subject of a lengthy article or even a book in its own right, but IO Watch wishes here only to identify the major elements and significance of each item, and then to continue to add material as further events occur. One might even dare to hope that, someday, many or all of these major problems will disappear as problems in a newly accountable, transparent, high-performing and reinvigorated UN.