

REPORTING EVASIVENESS

The drive for real UN management reform, accountability and transparency has been going on for six decades now, as discussed in considerable detail throughout this archive. The determined push to establish and apply full modern management accountability and transparency, however, began back in 1986 with a rebellion by Member States in the General Assembly's Fifth (Administrative) Committee:

" ... Member States [difficulty] in obtaining a complete picture of the processes of planning, budgeting, performance monitoring, and evaluation [was compounded because there was] ... no information on the implementation of the programmes of the preceding budget.'

' ... the new proposed programme budget ... had been drawn up without the benefit of a critical analysis of ongoing activities ... Member States were therefore unable to form a precise idea of the efficiency with which the resources were used or of the quality of the results ...'

" ... more time ought to be spent on evaluating the application and implementation of ... programmes.'

'[The General Assembly and relevant bodies] should be given more information ... to review the proposed programme properly and take enlightened decisions ...'

' ... [A Member State representative] could not believe that every programme element ... was fully useful ... Indeed, ... Member States [broadly believed] ... there was ample room for improvement, internal redeployment and reassessment of priorities. What the United Nations lacked was the machinery [for this purpose] ... A new impetus must be given to the identification of activities that were obsolete, of marginal usefulness or ineffective."

Critical statements made in the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly, in "Summary records", General Assembly, Fifth Committee document A/C.5/40/SR.22, paras. 3-5, 7, 15, 20 and 22, and A/C.5/40/SR.23, paras. 12-13, 38, 48, both of **6 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.

In response, the UN's then-top manager made an excellent and admirably succinct statement of what the UN Secretariat needed to do, which the Secretariat has (sort of) pursued ever since without ever attaining it:

"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 the above 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.

A year later the "Group of 18" experts made major reform recommendations, but all too soon the Secretariat was back in the same old inadequate reporting routines:

"A clear illustration ... was the Secretary-General's 1989 'final report' on the ... report of the 'Group of 18' experts. Although it 'encompassed all actions' and 'illustrated progress accomplished', it was only an information report ... [that had to be] supplemented in 1990 with an expressly analytical report which followed a specific framework established by the General Assembly. [Too many] recent Secretariat reports are ... still of the 'on the one hand ... on the other hand ... very difficult ... others have failed ... one might try ... will keep under careful review' type.

Reports nominally of the "Secretary-General" ... are in fact prepared by anonymous authors whose experience and competence ... is unspecified. They usually contain no explanation of scope or methodology used, and do not crisply document and summarize past reporting on the topic ... They gloss over rather than pinpoint problems, and still lack summaries, analysis of options, and firm conclusions and recommendations. This vast amount of 'assessment reporting' thus severely hampers United Nations accountability and oversight. It ties up scarce staff resources for trivial rather than useful reporting, clogs reporting channels with documents of limited value, and deprives top management and governing bodies of the substantive information they need to make effective policy decisions."

Joint Inspection Unit, "Accountability and oversight in the United Nations Secretariat", UN document A/48/420, **1993**, paras. 118-119.

The JIU observed in 1995 that the Fifth Committee was sinking under a flood of documentation, and that certain basic reporting reforms could help stem this flood. It recommended that the Committee require the following changes for reports made to it (which could apply to other reporting to intergovernmental bodies as well):

"Summary : Secretariat reports should emulate [most other UN system organizations and] ... require that every document have a brief summary at the front ... [to assist] busy readers.

Contents: The many Secretariat reports which omit a table of contents are a great disservice, and almost an insult, to readers ... all reports should contain [one].

On time: [many reports are very tardy] ... the 'six-weeks rule' for circulating documents to Member States before discussion should be much more firmly enforced, with sanctions

Action-oriented: ... Cautious and bland overviews of past efforts and current conditions should be replaced with specific (and time-limited) proposals for corrective action.

Accountability: ... [Under the new accountability system reports should clearly identify] ... the specific unit ... responsible for preparing each report ...

References: Present Secretariat reports contain almost no endnotes, and only vague text mention of a 'prior report' [or a cursory and obscure bibliographic notation] ... appropriate citations, with document titles, dates, and paragraph references should be added [to show a professional, complete, credible, and objective report] ...

Graphics: Most Secretariat management reports provide very few, if any, charts and graphs ... and tables are often [endless pages of details] ... instead of succinct quantitative summaries. One good picture continues to be worth a thousand words. In an era of 'desktop publishing,' the Secretariat should join other System organizations in providing ... many more report tables and graphs that clearly and concisely show major trends, patterns and status. ...

Question period: ... much more impact can sometimes be achieved by periodic appearances of key officials before the Fifth Committee for a dialogue ... this practice occurs widely in national governments ...

Necessary and substantive: ... intergovernmental bodies must do their parts ... not request 'a report' as a way to postpone or avoid their responsibilities for negotiations and discussions ... but require instead only those reports [essential to help] fulfill their oversight and policy-making functions.

Focused: [In addition] ... the intergovernmental bodies should state as clearly and specifically as possible the substantive issues which the requested Secretariat report should address."

Joint Inspection Unit, "Management in the United Nations: Work in progress", JIU/REP/95/8, UN document A/50/507, **1995**, paras. 164-165.

As already discussed in detail under 1993 Management Accountability Attempt, the General Assembly passed its most specific and detailed reform prescription ever, for the system of management accountability in 1993, and the Secretariat agreed profusely that drastic change was indeed needed. But then, in 1996, 1998, and 2000, it strung the Assembly along with more lengthy but vague "progress and intention" reports. When Secretary-General Annan declared victory in 2000, arguing that the new system was "installed," the Assembly backed off, apparently tired of the chase.

The ACABQ summarized the evasive Secretariat management reporting during this period in a "rather scathing report" in early 1998. It dismissed a Secretariat "concept paper" on reducing administrative costs in order to free up \$195 million for a proposed new UN "Development Account." The Committee criticized the 'lack of a clear concept,' and "was disbelieving of the claims made about efficiency gains and their impact." It suggested that it might be better if the Secretariat would

" ... 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.

Of course, the reforms continued not to be applied, or even completed. This was confirmed by a detailed US General Accounting Office report released in 2000, several months before Mr. Annan's accountability "victory declaration". The GAO concluded 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]

In 2002 Mr. Annan forged ahead with more dynamic reforms as part of his "agenda for further change", to take place in a "phased approach" which still continues on. Once more, however, the General Assembly is trying to stem the tide of "will soon" and 'could be's" by attempting yet again (see its efforts above of 1985) to obtain an emphasis on *highlighting results and accountability*. In its resolution on Mr. Annan's new initiatives, in May 2003, it began by requesting 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**, Section II.

It remains to be seen if the Secretariat, in late 2004, will finally come through with a solid report of the type that the General Assembly seeks. It seems more likely, however, that underneath the Secretariat rhetoric will be the old reality -- as Dirk Salomons stated it, also in 2003, that:

"... 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.]

The OIOS, tasked with performing the results-oriented management reporting that the Secretariat could not somehow gather itself to provide, found "significant progress" in early 2003 in a number of initiatives, as the OHRM struggles to change itself from "an administrative, oversight function" to a "more strategic, partnering role." But it did conclude 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.

It is particularly discouraging that the OHRM, like the OIOS itself, is now much taken with "partnering" and "cooperative" activities, in the "feel good" context of the new UN Integrity Initiative. IO Watch believes that it should instead be acting as a firm oversight figure to ensure that UN

Secretariat accountability is maintained, the rules are followed, and sanctions are applied where necessary (at which point, a long overdue programme of recognition of merit and outstanding performance for UN managers and staff could finally begin).

Whatever reporting the Secretariat may offer in late 2004, the US GAO has, thankfully, once again preempted it. The GAO did a follow-up on its 2000 report which was issued in February 2004. The GAO noted, interestingly enough, that one major implementation problem was that managers were not complying with monitoring and evaluation regulations and processes, and complained of a lack of additional resources to implement the management reforms. As the GAO summarized it:

"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 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]

The GAO concluded that there was a strong need for Member States to insist on regular reporting by the Secretary-General on all recent and current reform status and impact, and to work to overcome the resistance of managers to the reforms, as a critical factor:

"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 the resistance, and 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.

The excellent GAO 2004 report thus brings the story back full circle to the struggles of 1985 in the General Assembly to obtain proper management reporting from the Secretariat. Will the next cycle play out by the year 2025, when the third or fourth Secretary-General who follows Mr. Annan will promise that reform is just around the corner -- that is, if there is a functioning UN at that distant time?

However, the 2004 GAO report goes one critically important step further. It lays much of the blame for failure to establish and apply management accountability reform right where it belongs -- with the stubborn and recalcitrant UN senior managers who, like petulant children in primary school, refuse to act responsibly. This situation -- the deterioration of the UN management culture in recent years, and the continuing submission to them by the UN top leadership -- is in fact the next negative facet of this subsection.