

NON-IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RESOLUTION

Despite the very strong General Assembly resolution on establishing a system of management accountability and Mr. Niazi's very perceptive warning of 1994, the UN then began its familiar, multi-year pattern of ever-so-slow "implementation" of the Assembly's demands for improved management. In accord with the Assembly's own leisurely biennial calendar for considering "personnel" (and management) issues, the Secretariat provided cautious enthusiasm in 1994, a "busy" period of various "intentions and activities underway" in 1996, and sober warnings in 1998 that "a long time" would be needed to implement the reforms.

However, in 2000 Secretary-General Annan suddenly declared victory and, beginning in 2001, managerial accountability issues were largely relegated to a rhetorical afterthought. This very disappointing sequence of events, as outlined below, was punctuated with reminders of just how fundamentally flawed UN "management reform" processes continue to be.

The sudden insistence by the General Assembly on a new UN management accountability system by the first of January 1995 made 1994 a year of hasty adjustment for the Secretariat. A first report on establishing the new system in August outlined a framework for the new system, related reform activities, and new accountability mechanisms to be established. It also contained a surprising *mea culpa* about the severe UN managerial defects of the past half century and the need for ensuring accountability:

"... [UN staff and managers' capacity and expertise at all levels] must correspond to the responsibility assigned and authority delegated and must be balanced by full accountability through appropriate accountability mechanisms. An efficient organizational oversight machinery will monitor the operation of the system and conduct audits, inspections, evaluations and investigations ... The systematic control of the interrelated processes ... will provide the key to success ... and contribute to the Organization's effectiveness and efficiency.

"In the establishment of [the new system one must consider the difficulties involved] ... in particular the need to change attitudes and established and well-entrenched bureaucratic habits. ... the Organization must transform itself. In so doing, the utmost care should be taken to develop a real 'management culture', to put measures in place that will encourage improved performance and higher levels of productivity and ensure quality work. ... In short, the objective should be the creation of a mission-driven

and result-oriented Organization..."

"Establishment of a transparent and effective system of accountability and responsibility: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/C.5/49/1 of **5 August 1994**, paras. 12 and 109. [emphasis added]

This sharp focus on the General Assembly's accountability reforms was immediately blurred, however, by other "reform business". Each Secretary-General has had his own set of grand "reforms" to pursue, by reshuffling the complex UN organizational structure and adjusting the "focus" of UN work. An acerbic summary in September 1994 by a sharp long-time observer of UN goings-on, the *International Documents Review*, assessed Mr. Butros Ghali's reform efforts and observed that

"[The Secretary General's report says it seeks] 'to improve and enhance the Secretariat's ability to meet [Member States'] strategic objectives and priorities', but does not say what these ... are, nor put the changes that have been made into any overall historical perspective. ...

Later sections of the report provide more descriptive detail (but little analysis). ...

The report is extremely tentative in drawing conclusions. The [reform] process being assessed 'is by its nature a continuing one,' aimed at adapting the organization ... As such, it is an effort [alternating] periods of restructuring with periods of consolidation. In the circumstances, the assessment exercise is best approached, like restructuring itself, as a learning process.'

To translate that unkindly, restructuring is being undertaken without clear aims or a strategic sense of direction."

"S-G's 'initial' assessment of Secretariat reform sets out no strategy, sees process continuing", *International Documents Review* (New York), **5 September 1994**, pp. 1-3.

[Note: the report referred to is "Restructuring of the United Nations Secretariat: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/49/336 of **24 August 1994**.]

Nonetheless, an October 1994 Secretariat report went even further in acknowledging the past grave failures of overall UN personnel (henceforth "human resources") management, under heavy pressure from a strong General Assembly resolution of April 1993. The report stated that

"[it] outlines a strategy to modernize and re-energize human resources management in the [UN Secretariat] ...

[While the UN's role and mandates have expanded], commensurate changes and modernization in human resources management have not occurred. As a result, [such] management has been fragmented, bureaucratic and incapable of dealing expeditiously with ever-changing demands ... The Office of Human Resources Management has been largely unable to address properly [its essential] planning and management functions. ... [This in turn has] partially contributed to the slow deployment of field missions, inadequate people management, low staff morale, and insufficient mobility. Thus, the time is overdue ... to introduce changes to maximize the contribution of [UN] human resources."

"A strategy for the management of the human resources of the Organization: Revised estimates ...: Report of the Secretary-General ", UN document A/C.5/49/5 of **21 October 1994**, paras. 1 and 23.

[Note: The General Assembly document mentioned is "Personnel questions," resolution 47/226 of 30 April 1993.]

However, the rest of the report labored to explain and expand upon this frank *mea culpa*. Another incisive assessment by the *IDR* stated that

"A strategy was presented to the General Assembly in a document of atrociously low quality, even by UN standards. The writing is crusty with jargon, repetitive, and structured like a multi-jointed creature out of Dr. Seuss. ...

It makes the rather startling revelation that [OHRM] does not have a planning component. It does not explain why this is so, or how the Office has managed to operate for nearly five decades without planning its activities. As if enunciating a new discovery, the report says that 'Planning is essential ...' [Its] absence ... has contributed significantly to current OHRM management weaknesses. ...'

[The report then states that] 'It is intended that [UN] senior management be involved in the planning process and party to all important decision-making relating to human resources planning and change.' (Traditionally, senior management has considered OHRM a generally unnecessary encumbrance, to be called into action only to fend off unsuitable offerings of personnel from pushy ambassadors. Its powers of locating competent staff for recruitment are held in such low esteem that no senior manager in his right mind would initiate a request without having someone already identified, or even on board as a consultant or short-term contract employee.)"

"Strategy to improve UN staff management and quality explained in atrociously written report," International Documents Review (New York), 7 November 1994, pp. 4-5.

In 1995 the Joint Inspection Unit provided two more reports on accountability issues. The first examined accountability and oversight in the UN system, noting that the System's functions and tasks had rapidly expanded, that expenditures had risen to more than \$12 billion per year, and that:

"There has never been a comprehensive review of accountability, management improvement, and oversight activities within the United Nations system. Such a review seems particularly timely now in light of ... performance pressures, new initiatives underway, and calls for improvement from many sources. ... it seems increasingly urgent that the organizations clearly demonstrate wise resource use and programme responsiveness, because the pressures for high-quality performance will quite probably only intensify.

This report is only an initial 'baseline' survey [to help each organization consider strengthening actions for]:

- A strategic and integrated approach.
- Internal oversight units.
- Management systems.
- Human resources management.
- Inter-agency activities.
- External system-wide oversight bodies.
- Oversight governing bodies."

Joint Inspection Unit, "Accountability, management improvement, and oversight in the United Nations system", Part I "Overview and analysis", Part II "Comparative tables", UN document A/50/503, 1995, "Executive Summary".

A second JIU report explored the UN Secretariat's progress in management reform in light of General Assembly resolution 48/218 A of 1993. It examined ten reform areas, assessing "progress made" in six areas and "progress required" in four others. It stated in general that

"United Nations management' has been termed an oxymoron, a juxtaposition of incompatibles. Over the past fifty years, there have been various attempts to strengthen United Nations programmes and improve their management, but they have not been well implemented. ...

... the General Assembly insisted very forcefully in 1993 that [a new system of managerial accountability] be installed by 1 January 1995. The task is daunting. ... Such a major redirection ... evokes powerful fears of, and resistance to, any changes in comfortable ways of doing things.

However, the future status and credibility of the United Nations require it to demonstrate that it is a learning organization which will skillfully and flexibly manage its limited resources to produce results ...

The current effort is undoubtedly the best, and possibly the last, opportunity to establish a strong management culture and performance emphasis in the United Nations.

... The Inspector believes that additional specific actions in four areas are essential to maintain the momentum that has been generated ...

Accountability for accountability.

Clear responsibility for programme delivery.

Related issues of Secretariat management reform.

Intergovernmental body oversight and leadership."

Joint Inspection Unit, "Management in the United Nations: Work in progress", UN document A/50/507, 1995, "Executive Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations."

The first biennial progress report on the new managerial reforms in 1996, and the last set of reports provided by Secretary-General Butros Butros-Ghali, was very disappointing. It highlighted the dynamism of his reform initiatives, but meandered through a variety of challenges, expectations, and activities. It concluded with a grandiose sentence (that did at least toss in the word "accountability") that

"The Secretary-General's strategy for modernizing the management of the Organization's human resources ... has been the corner stone on which the Secretariat has worked to build a performance-driven, service-oriented culture and supportive work environment that encourages improved managerial skills, increased managerial responsibility and effectiveness through increased delegated authority, responsibility and accountability as well as optimal individual staff performance and, thereby, improved organizational performance."

"Implementation of the strategy for the management of the Organization's human resources: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/C.5/51/1 of 16 August 1996, Summary.

In an angry resolution in early 1997, the General Assembly called for an extensive set of further and more specific reports.

'Recalling' the Secretary-General's strategy, the Assembly stated that it

"1.2. Regrets with deep concern that further progress in the implementation of the adopted strategy has not been achieved, and urges the Secretary-General to take the necessary action to ensure its full implementation ...;

3. Regrets the unsuccessful efforts to develop a management environment and culture in the Organization that enables staff members to contribute their maximum potential, effectiveness, and efficiency;

4. Calls on the Secretary-General to pursue the full implementation of his strategy as soon as possible;

...

II. Reaffirming its resolution 48/218A of 23 December 1993, in particular the request therein for a mechanism ensuring that programme managers are accountable for the effective management of human resources allocated to them,

...

2. Requests the Secretary-General 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 due process rights of all staff members, including managers;

3. Also requests the Secretary-General to issue specific administrative instructions to establish clearly the responsibility and accountability of programme managers for proper use of human resources, as well as sanctions in accordance with staff rule 112.3 for any financial loss suffered by the United Nations as a result of gross negligence, including improper motivation, willful violation of or reckless disregard for the staff Regulations and Rules and established policies regulating recruitment, placement and promotion;

4. Deplores the high number of exceptions to the established procedures for the recruitment, placement, and promotion of staff, in particular in the Office of Human Resources Management;

...

6. Welcomes the intention of the Secretary-General to streamline administrative procedures and eliminate duplication, in relation to human resources management, through delegation of authority to programme managers, and requests him to ensure, before delegating such authority, that well-designed mechanisms of accountability, including the necessary internal monitoring and control procedures, as well as training, are put in place, and to report to the General Assembly ... [in1998] ..."

"Human resources management", General Assembly resolution 51/226 of **25 April 1997**, Part I, paras. 2-4, Part II, first preambular and paras. 2-4, and 6.
[emphasis added]

This clear lack of effort to implement the 1993 management accountability resolution continued on. The following excerpt of a January 1997 Secretariat procedural document illustrates both the typical mind-numbing Secretariat prose [for which IO Watch apologizes to the reader], and the seemingly perpetual delays and disorder in UN decision-making.

"In its resolution 45/254 A of 21 December 1990, the General Assembly decided to continue considering annually the administrative, structural and other aspects of the improvement of the efficiency of the Organization, and requested the Secretary-General to report accordingly.

At its thirty-fourth session the Committee [for Programme and Coordination]

endorsed the measures on the establishment of a transparent and effective system of accountability and responsibility to be taken by 1 January 1995 and recommended that future proposals should be submitted as appropriate to the General Assembly through the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

At its thirty-fifth session ... the Committee recognized the need to pay more in-depth attention to its coordinating role, which should be based on substantive issues. ...

Furthermore, it should be recalled that at its resumed forty-ninth session, the General Assembly in its decision 49/489, decided to defer the consideration of the documents relating to the review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations and requested the Secretary-General to update his report on the restructuring of the Secretariat [A/49/336], and to apprise the Assembly of the measures taken to implement the recommendations taken in his report on the establishment of a transparent and effective system of accountability and responsibility [A.C.5/49/1]. In its decision 50/503, the General Assembly decided to defer, once again, the consideration of the documents relating to the review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations to its fifty-first session.

At its 36th session, the Committee, in view of the absence of a report of the Secretary-General on the administrative, structural and other aspects of improvement of the efficiency of the Organization as a whole, as mandated in General Assembly resolution 45/254 of December 1990, decided to defer to its thirty-seventh session the consideration of the question of review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations."

"Adoption of the agenda and organization of work: Provisional agenda," Committee for Programme and Coordination, Thirty-seventh session, 9 June-3 July 1997, UN document E.AC.51/1997/1 of **March 1997**, item 3. "Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations."

The above complications and acrimony in UN decision-making are unfortunately typical, as analysed by a blue-ribbon expert group of UN "insiders" in 1997. They feared that various practices, habits, attitudes, and misperceptions on the part of both the Secretariat and Member States had fueled an "us versus them" mentality that could well undermine the mid-1990s UN reform attempts. The group described the

"Sins of member states:

Secretariat staff resent ...member state interference in ... their daily work ... [their micromanagement of] the hiring and promotion of Secretariat personnel. [and of] Secretariat budgeting, too often ...seeking to control the minor details of spending allocations.

Secretariat staff members are also frustrated by lack of clear direction from intergovernmental bodies. Too often member states fail to agree on how best to confront global problems Moreover, mandates are frequently assigned to the Secretariat with little thought as to the resources needed for their implementation.

Sins of the Secretariat:

.... Member states contend that ineffective -- some would say nonexistent -- managerial practices throughout the Secretariat have led to inefficient use of the [UN resources] ...; a staff unaccountable for its actions and prone to delegate upwards; insufficient program coordination ...; and wasteful duplication of efforts. There has been a lack of transparency in Secretariat decision making [on] policy issues, personnel, and budget expenditures. ... much of the information that is provided is not timely or readable. ... Overall, inefficiency and lack of accountability within the Secretariat,

whether perceived or real, have invited member state micromanagement. "

"Making UN reform work: Improving member state-Secretariat relations",
Report of the twenty-eighth United Nations issues conference, The Stanley
Foundation, **February 21-23, 1997**, pp. 2, 14-16.

Even more significantly, the management accountability reform was pushed far into the background by the sweeping reform plans announced by the new Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, in July 1997. His report considered management reforms as only one small reform area in a major UN "reconfiguration", which focused not on management accountability but on efficiency measures to cut staff posts and costs. As he stated:

"I am pleased to submit ... what I believe to be the most extensive and far-reaching reforms in the fifty-two year history of the Organization. ...

... the Organization needs to be significantly reconfigured to do better ... also so realize significant administrative efficiencies.

...

The report seeks ... on my own initiative, nothing less than to transform the leadership and management structure of the Organization. ...

... it also includes complementary measures that reside within the jurisdiction of Member States ... and several more fundamental proposals ... for possible action in the longer term."

"Renewing the United Nations: A programme for reform: Report of the Secretary-General," UN document A/51/950 of **14 July 1997**, Letter of transmittal.

Member states were not pleased with the accumulation of reform plans and ideas. In a "rather scathing report" in early 1998, the ACABQ 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. [emphasis added]

In his 1998 report to the General Assembly on human resources management, Secretary-General Annan did not mention management accountability at all in his summary of eighteen personnel items included. He did, however, note still more conceptual principles and intentions for managerial accountability processes within a discussion of the delegation of authority. He stated that

"A comprehensive and effective system of delegation of authority rests on three premises: responsibility ... resources and authority ... and accountability being established at all levels through appropriate mechanisms.

... Clearly there are many levels of accountability in the Organization. ...

Mechanisms of accountability provide tools that foster informed, well-documented and reasoned decisions ... [which] should address the following questions ... and take into account the following principles ... [and include] periodic management review or follow-up ... [and] regular reporting derived from monitoring and follow-up.

With regard to sanctions ... it is the *intention* of the Secretary-General to *explore the possibility* of establishing a management review panel ... for reviewing specific cases of non-compliance ... [and to] make recommendations to the Secretary-General for action ... to meet the General Assembly's concerns ... in paragraph 3 of section II of resolution 51/226."

"Human resources management: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/53/342 of **4 September 1998**, paras. 9-11, 24-30. [emphasis added]

In a second 1998 report on human resources management reform the Secretary-General presented a "vision ... for change comprising objectives to be obtained over the next three to five years" [i. e., between 2001-2003]. He mentioned accountability only briefly, as being integral to "an organizational culture of empowerment," and stated that

" ... Staff members at all levels ... must be held accountable for delivering assigned outputs on a timely and cost-effective basis ... and for upholding the values and principles of the Organization ...

.... *The prime responsibility for taking action to remedy accidental and intentional performance failures will lie with supervisors and managers at all levels.* ...

... In addition the Department of Management is *considering* the setting up of transparent accountability mechanisms ..."

"Human resources management reform: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/53/414 of **13 October 1998**, paras. 6-9. [emphasis added]

The General Assembly remained skeptical in its resolution on these reports. It not only repeated its insistence on ensuring, "before delegating ... authority, that well-designed mechanisms of accountability ... are put in place" [see para. II.6 of the resolution 51/226 of 25 April 1997 above.] It stated further that it

"IV. Delegation of authority and accountability ...

3. Also notes that *no comprehensive system of accountability and responsibility has been established*; ...

10. *Reiterates* its request to the Secretary-General [see para. II.2 of resolution 51/226] to enhance managerial accountability with respect to human resources management decisions, including imposing sanctions in case of demonstrated mismanagement of staff and willful neglect of or disregard for established roles and procedures, while safeguarding the right of due process of all staff members, including managers."

"Human resources management," General Assembly resolution 53/221 of **23 April 1999**. [emphasis added]

In late 2000 the Secretary-General presented the next round of reports on Secretariat progress in the midst of a growing mass of his own management reform activities. In a first report, requested specifically by the General Assembly, he stated that, with regard to management irregularities causing financial loss:

" ... the Secretary-General is in the process of establishing procedures to [allow preliminary investigation of allegations of 'gross negligence'] by heads of departments/offices or [the OIOS], [followed up where necessary] ... under revised Joint Disciplinary Committee procedures ... [and] As part of his programme for management reform ... measures to to establish a more effective accountability system ... such as [a] programme management plan, [an] Accountability Panel and monitoring of delegated authority

The Secretary-General believes that a comprehensive approach to accountability, backed up by all these measures, will contribute significantly to detecting and preventing management irregularities."

"Follow-up report on management irregularities causing financial losses to the Organization: Report of the Secretary-General", UN document A/54/793 of **13 March 2000**, para. 25. [emphasis added]

In a second report in 2000 on overall human resources management reform, the Secretary-General announced that

"The present report presents a series of building blocks for human resource management reform ... as integrated elements in the drive to improve the Organization's work ... The specific proposals represent a process of evolution ... The Secretary-General views the mechanisms of accountability, the monitoring processes and the control procedures as an integral part of the initiatives he is putting forward.

... In view of the importance ascribed by all parties [Member States, the Secretary-General and his management team, and the staff) to the need for well-designed mechanisms of accountability ... each section of the present report contains concrete elements of accountability relevant to human resources management."

"Human resources management reform: Report of the Secretary-General", A/55/253 of **1 August 2000**, Summary and paras. 6-7.

[Note: the summary of this report scarcely mentions the topic of "accountability" in its summary, and the various specific "building block" sections "on a variety of subjects" in this 44-page report seem to provide mostly accountability "intentions," or activities contemplated, or those only just beginning .]

In his third and concluding report in August 2000, Secretary-General Annan summarized the status of accountability and responsibility reform actions since 1994, and -- quite abruptly -- declared "victory":

"The present report delineates the continuum between responsibility, authority and accountability and presents the elements of an integrated and effective system of accountability. It outlines the progress made ... highlights the recent changes introduced to enhance or supplement existing accountability mechanisms, and outlines changes in the policy and management culture of the Organization which will allow for the effective

implementation of the comprehensive system of accountability now established.

...

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."

The General Assembly may wish to take note of the mechanisms in place since 1994, including those discussed in the present report, which together constitute the comprehensive system of accountability for the Organization."

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

This report would have done well to have examined its own Annexes before making this vigorous conclusion. Annex I 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. More directly, the Secretariat has never given the General Assembly any systematic report on steps 3 and 4, especially on the results obtained and follow-up measures being taken:

- "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)]

An even more emphatic and substantive rebuttal to Secretary-General Annan's insistence that accountability mechanisms were then in place and being effectively used came only a month later. A damning article, reporting on the status of work in 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 press such interviews with OIOS staff seem to have come to an abrupt end after this article appeared, as discussed in the section on OIOS which follows.]

There is more. A very detailed and expert assessment of the Secretary-General's reform plan had been made 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]

In 2001, the General Assembly did not directly endorse the Secretary-General's confident assertions about a comprehensive system of accountability (and mechanisms) in place and being effectively used. It repeated for the third time that the Secretary-General should ensure that well-designed mechanisms of accountability were in place before delegating authority to programme managers. It repeated for the third time that he should enhance managerial accountability and impose sanctions for demonstrated mismanagement. It also added some new fundamental

cautions that are rather unusual (and would not seem necessary) for an organization that had already been operating for 55 years:

- "VII.2 Emphasizes that the administrative and managerial discretionary powers of the Secretary-General should be in conformity with the relevant provisions of the Charter;
3. Reiterates that every staff member ... shall be responsible and accountable to the Secretary General, in accordance with financial rule 114.1 and staff 112.3;
 4. Emphasizes that any delegation of authority should be in accordance with the Charter and the regulations and rules ...;
 5. Stresses that rules and regulations governing separation from service shall be followed strictly;
 7. Requests the Secretary-General to continue to improve accountability and responsibility ... and monitoring and control mechanisms ... and report on the implementation of his proposals [in 2002] ...
 8. Report ... [in 2002] on the progress achieved, including with regard to management irregularities;;
 10. Decides to further consider the issue of a robust monitoring capacity in the Office of Human Resources Management ... and [requests] an analytical and thorough report thereon [in 2002]. "

"Human resources management," General Assembly resolution 55/258 of **14 June 2001**, "Section VII., Delegation of authority and accountability."

Yet, in an interview in May 2001, Shashi Tharoor, head of the UN Department of Public Information, responded to a question on UN information activities:

"How do you ensure that DPI isn't seen as a propaganda tool, yet that it serves the UN's objectives?

By telling the truth! Information isn't propaganda unless you doctor it to distort reality or hide inconvenient facts. We don't do that.

I think you'll admit that under Secretary General Kofi Annan we have the most transparent United Nations imaginable ..."

Pranay Gupte, "Q & A: Shashi Tharoor: 'Why information matters at the UN'," Earth Times, **May 2001**, p. 16.

[Note: the article began by citing Mr. Tharoor as "an established novelist, columnist and nonfiction author, a familiar byline in many of the world's top publications, ... also a highly sought-after figure on the lecture circuit. His new novel, 'Riot', is scheduled for publication ... and is already generating considerable buzz."

One wonders how Mr. Tharoor ever finds time for his weighty responsibilities as a senior Department head and top publicist for the UN.]

As this very optimistic self-assessment indicates, the interest of UN management in actually implementing the 1993 "management accountability" reform of the General Assembly, now a decade back in history, is gone. In 2002, the brief "accountability and oversight" discussion in the Secretary-General's annual report, under the topic of "enhancing management," was summarized as follows:

"The Office of Internal Oversight Services is working in partnership with managers at all levels to instill accountability and best management practices throughout the

Organization."

"Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization," UN document A/57/1, **2002**, paras. 193-200.

Another 2002 report, on human resources management reform, stated that several years would be needed to "institutionalize" the reforms, and that the "mechanisms in place," and in particular monitoring by OHRM, would help ensure this. The Secretary-General's 2003 annual report also focused its accountability summary on OIOS oversight activities, with little mention of specific progress toward performance management or ensuring management accountability, although it did mention that there were "increased allegations" of misconduct, mismanagement and abuse, and waste.

"Human resources management reform: Report of the Secretary-General," UN document A/57/293 of **8 August 2002**, paras. 12, 87-89, and

"Report of the Secretary-General on the work of the Organization," UN document A/58/1, **2003**, paras. 207-211..

Actually, in the autumn of 2002 Secretary-General Annan had already concluded that the 1997 reforms had had "some important achievements," and he forged ahead on a new agenda for further change. The General Assembly, however, pressed in early 2003 for comprehensive reporting and requested that all future reports on human resources management reform measures should focus on the results and achievements. The Secretariat subsequently provided three more reports in 2002-2003, but they were confined to OHRM monitoring (which was starting quite slowly), other reform changes underway in OHRM, and the status of implementation of the Secretary-General's 2002 proposals a year later.

"Strengthening of the United Nations: An agenda for further change: Report of the Secretary-General, UN document A/57/387 of **9 September 2002**,

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

"Monitoring capacity in the Office of Human Resources Management: Report of the Secretary-General," UN document A/57/226 of **17 September 2002**,

"Implementation of all provisions of General Assembly resolution 55/258 on human resources management," UN document A/57/726 of **10 February 2003**, and

"Status of actions described in the report of the Secretary-General entitled 'Strengthening of the United Nations: an agenda for further change: Report of the Secretary-General, UN document A/58/351 of **5 September 2003**.

Well, the Secretariat had stated in 1998 that installing the major management accountability and other performance management reforms might take some time, running on for three to five years, i.e., perhaps as late as 2003. So, looking back, did the Secretariat get the job done? IO Watch believes the answer is No, and a detailed study underscores this conclusion.

In February 2004, the US General Accounting Office reported on an extensive and systematic exam of the status of Mr. Annan's 1997 and 2002 reforms (but not the now-forgotten management accountability system). It found that not only were the reforms still incomplete, but that general reform actions, targets, interim goals and completion dates were very muddled or nonexistent, and that regular reporting should be provided to clearly inform Member States of the status and impact of reform measures.

"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 , and see again the GAO's report of May 10, 2000 cited above.]

As indicated by the underscored material above, the GAO report found that the UN management accountability reform efforts of 1993 were still very incomplete. A major reason, it seems clear, is managers' resistance to being held accountable. In a later report section entitled "Various factors may impede full implementation of U.N. reforms," the GAO first cites 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 stated that:

"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.]

Two other extremely important GAO points must be noted, first from its recommendations for U.S. government (and other Member State) action, and second the concluding sentence of the third item on factors impeding UN reform cited above:

"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.

Available at www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-339 .]

These GAO observations and conclusions of February 2004 are very disturbing, particularly in the context of the General Assembly's firm 1993 management accountability initiative and all the other UN management reforms that the Assembly and outside experts have proposed over the years. In the opinion of IO Watch, they spotlight several harsh truths.

(1) Bad (but influential) UN managers evade management accountability measures and sanctions simply by sabotaging their implementation. Various citations in the preceding and following archive sections show that this has been going on for years, and continues.

(2) the General Assembly's 1993 management accountability reform initiative is officially dead and buried. The focus shifted to seeking management accountability through the much more vague and grand reforms proposed in 1997 and 2002, and in 2004-2005 is

shifting once again to new, overall UN reform attempts as a centerpiece for the 60th anniversary "celebrations" of the UN's existence in late 2005.

Regrettably, if the GAO does another follow-up report in 2008 to discover why UN management problems continue, the focus will probably be on the grand new reforms of 2007 (from a new Secretary-General) and why they are not yet being implemented.

(3) Mr. Annan's own sweeping reform plans of 1997 and 2002 to "transform" the UN were actually of so little importance, as the GAO noted, that he did not request, nor did he provide, additional resources necessary to seriously and properly implement them, and the new grand ideas for 2005 concentrate on global threats rather than Secretariat management capacity to work effectively in meeting them.

(4) To underscore point (1) and following on the GAO's assessment of UN management reform, "Managers' support is critical for the institutionalization of reforms in the long term". In IO Watch's opinion, the current situation, and fifty years of struggle, demonstrate that UN managers quite simply do not want management reform. In fact, they will block it forever until Member States insist once and for all that firm action be taken. Pragmatic actions to ensure such implementation are provided under Answers: A Starting Point in the concluding section on Recent Developments .

In December 2004 the General Assembly provided a sad coda, in its resolution on the work of the OIOS, to the entire management accountability effort of the past decade, The effort very much resembled a memorial ceremony to mourn a long-lost soul, following which it merely repeated the usual bromides about "strengthening" accountability and the work of the OIOS and its external oversight bodies. It stated hollowly that it:

- "4. Affirms its primary role in the consideration of and action taken on the reports presented to it;
5. Notes that no mechanism has been established for the follow-up of [OIOS] recommendations, including those considered by the General Assembly;
6. Emphasizes the importance of establishing real, effective and efficient mechanisms for responsibility and accountability;
- 7. Regrets that despite previous information provided by the Secretary-General on the establishment of accountability mechanisms, including the accountability panel, such mechanisms are not in place, thereby affecting the efficient and effective functioning of the Organization;**

"Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 48/218B and 54/244: Report of the Fifth Committee", UN document A/59/649 of 22

December 2004, and

"Review of the implementation of General Assembly resolutions 48/218 B and 54/244", General Assembly resolution 59/272 of **23 December 2004**, esp. paras. 4-7. [emphasis added]

Also in December 2004, in its overall resolution on human resources management reform, the Assembly was largely and regrettably just tired and repetitive. It 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.

[Note: the above list of past resolutions notably omitted the original one -- 48/218 A on the management accountability system. The Secretariat seems indeed to have been successful in expunging this bold General Assembly step from any further UN discourse and follow-up.]

The one new phrase added at the end of this decade-long exhortation at least 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.

One simple statement indicates how other international organizations just go ahead and do what the United Nations

avoids. The International Olympic Committee (IOC, discussed further in this archive's section on inadequate UN oversight) went through a massive scandal, special external review, and extensive reform at the end of the 1990s. Unlike the UN, it has since worked to ensure that the reforms are being effectively implemented. As the IOC's new leader stated in 2001:

"Q: You said in Moscow that you wanted to create a reform commission in 2002. Hasn't the IOC already reformed itself?

A: We reformed indeed. However, my purpose will be, and I will appoint a commission in September, first to see if the 52 reforms we passed in December 1999 are still valid. You have to look at if they are working well. What is imperfect must be improved. What is working badly must be changed, and what is missing must be implemented, with always the intention to have further reform and more transparency and more accountability. I think every organization must review its workings on a regular basis, and we will do this two years after the reform."

"Q & A: Jacques Rogge: Olympics chief aims to cure sport's 'diseases'," International Herald Tribune, **August 9, 2001**.