

"HUMAN RESOURCES" MANAGEMENT

The UN Secretariat was forced by the 1993 management accountability resolution and other General Assembly directives to admit that the UN must transform itself. It had to finally attempt to develop a real management culture; install measures to improve performance and productivity and ensure quality work; and create a mission-driven and results-oriented Organization.

The new Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) had modernized its name but not its work and capacities, despite greatly increased UN roles and mandates. UN management was at last recognized as being fragmented, bureaucratic and incapable of meeting changing demands. This continuing failure to address Secretariat human resource planning and management needs is shown by the quotations in the Personnel subsection under UN Performance Problems, and it has clearly contributed to slowly-deployed field missions, inadequate staff management, and low staff morale.

As the outgoing UN top manager had succinctly stated in his "Thornburgh report" of March 1993 to the Secretary-General:

"Current problems in what you have correctly identified as 'the present outmoded system of personnel management' constitute a major stumbling block to true reform within the Organization.

Defects exist in nearly every aspect of present personnel practice. Recruitment has been undertaken on a more or less haphazard basis and consumes an inordinate amount of time. Training programmes are insufficient. Promotion exercises have become inordinately complicated to the point of being nearly unworkable ... Discipline and dismissal procedures are encumbered by seemingly interminable appeals processes.

The result is too much 'deadwood' doing too little work and too few good staff members doing too much, over-extending themselves sometimes to the point where they have become counter-productive."

Dick Thornburgh, Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management, "Report to the Secretary-General of the United Nations" ["The Thornburgh report"], **1 March 1993**, pp. 8-9.

This 50-year failure to properly manage personnel matters is all the more grievous because the "products" of the Secretariat are the services provided by its staff. UN senior officials repeatedly, and hypocritically in light of the above performance, often refer to the UN staff as "the UN's most

precious resource."

In the decade since the 1994 *mea culpa*, there has once again been much Secretariat rhetoric, many expert groups, and many plans and a bustle of activities in the major human resource management areas:

- recruitment, placement, and promotion;
- staff performance ratings;
- career development;
- staff regulations and rules;
- staff codes of conduct;
- discrimination and sexual harassment;
- management training and improvement; and
- staff representation.

In most, but not all, of these areas, the Secretariat has asserted that significant progress has been made. But closer analysis indicates the same patterns of muddled efforts which largely maintain the old *status quo*.

CUNMA believes that this weakness in the UN's most important management area is clearly due to the entrenched attitudes and interests of many UN senior officials. Like any other privileged group, they are extremely reluctant to give up the powers, control, and indeed impunity that they have steadily built up over more than half-a-century.

As discussed throughout the UN Performance Problems section of this archive, the old guard steadily obstruct and delay urgently needed management reforms, so that they will not be forced to operate in a transparent organization, be held directly accountable for what they accomplish, or be confronted with the hazards of firm anti-corruption measures.

The six-decade struggle over "whose UN?" and therefore the UN's future, must firmly pursue the question of how UN managers utilize "their" staff resources, and be measured against the often-cited but almost always ignored UN Charter insistence that

"The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. ... "

"Article 101.3, Charter of the United Nations, 1945.

For these reasons, the above UN human resources management

issues, processes, and reform efforts are not discussed here under the lesser topic of management system reform attempts, but instead in terms of the OHRM role in fundamental UN performance and accountability issues in the subsection OHR(Mis)management under the Inadequate UN Oversight section.