

# Ensuring a Well-Managed United Nations

37th United Nations Issues  
Conference

February 17-19, 2006  
Castle on the Hudson  
Tarrytown, New York

## Chairman's Observations and Summary

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Conference discussions at the Castle on the Hudson involved the right group of people and occurred at the right time. The discussions took place on the eve of the release of two reports from the secretary-general dealing with the review of mandates and the review of the rules, regulations, and policies that govern budgetary, financial, and personnel matters.

A great deal of suspicion and mistrust already pervades the atmosphere for decisions on these issues. But the group assembled for this conference was in a position to cut through the suspicion and allay the mistrust. There must be affirmation and assurance that the purpose of this process is, as one participant put it, a United Nations that delivers better, not less. The goal of the review is a well-managed, accountable, and transparent United Nations that is as effective as possible in implementing the decisions made by its key organs. And the goal is a United Nations that is focused outward—on producing results—rather than one that wastes resources on unproductive internal machinations.

A constructive and reassuring proposal to affirm this objective was advanced by several participants. The review of mandates and rules and regulations should be conducted with a zero-sum budget understanding. That is, any savings due to efficiencies, elimination of obsolete mandates, and changes in rules and regulations should be used for more productive activities, but remain within the same budget cluster or envelope. The purpose of reform is not to change the direction of UN programming, but rather to use finite resources more effectively on the highest priority needs.

Second, the process must be phased. The review of mandates and rules and regulations cannot be completed within the first half of 2006. But there must be a tangible and substantial first phase of the review, which is agreed and approved in order to demonstrate significant progress. If a first phase begins to streamline mandates and their implementation, this ought to satisfy those who insisted on an expenditure limit in the 2006 budget approval. Such a first step will be facilitated if the process starts with so-called “low-hanging fruit” and does not attempt to deal with highly sensitive and controversial issues at the outset.

The success of this review process will be greatly enhanced if those who lead and influence the process will affirm and reinforce understandings that: (1) the goal is a United Nations that delivers better and not less, (2) the savings achieved by means of the review will be preserved within the same budget cluster and, (3) the process will be phased and will include a tangible first step to be completed by June 2006. These principles received broad support at the Castle on the Hudson.

Renewal and reform should be continuing activities of any large organization, including the United Nations. Let us hope that UN members and all others involved in the current renewal effort will be able to defuse the suspicion and mistrust that threatens significant progress in the renewal hoped for in the summit Outcome Document.

## Participant List

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Affiliations are listed for identification purposes only. Participants attended as individuals rather than as representatives of their governments or organizations.



Richard H. Stanley  
President, The Stanley Foundation

## Opening Remarks

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by Richard H. Stanley

Welcome to the Stanley Foundation's 37th annual United Nations Issues Conference. The foundation convenes this conference each year to offer an informal opportunity to discuss key items on the agenda at the United Nations. Once again, our meeting takes place in the context of a concerted effort to strengthen and revitalize the United Nations, an effort that was energized in the fall of 2003 with the appointment of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change. Work of the UN Millennium Project, the secretary-general and other members of the Secretariat, members of the General Assembly led by their president and appointed facilitators, and many others contributed substance and momentum.

Five months ago the world's heads of state and government gathered at the United Nations in New York. At a high-level plenary meeting of

the General Assembly, they adopted an Outcome Document developed from the previous work. It, among other things, reaffirmed the vital importance of an effective multilateral system, with a strong United Nations at its core, in order to better address the multifaceted and interconnected challenges and threats confronting our world and to achieve progress in the areas of development, security, and human rights. They committed to spare no efforts in promoting and strengthening the effectiveness of the organization and the implementation of its decisions. They approved an ambitious agenda in four areas: development, peace and collective security, human rights and the rule of law, and strengthening of the United Nations. They pledged to make the United Nations more relevant, more effective, more efficient, more accountable, and more credible and to provide the organization with the resources needed to fully implement its mandates.

Now we are challenged to continue and complete this current effort to strengthen and revitalize the United Nations. This push is often called "UN reform," but that's not the best descriptor. A better term is *renewal* of the United Nations. Our real goal is not merely to tinker with the organization's machinery. Rather, it is to build the United Nations into a world body that is the core of an effective multilateral system and is as effective as possible in tackling urgent problems such as extreme poverty, terrorism, dangerous weapons, and human rights abuses. To paraphrase the title of the high-level panel report, our shared responsibility is to build a world that is more secure, more peaceful, more free, and more just.

Under the leadership of President Eliasson and the cochairs he nominated for each of the issues, the General Assembly has been following through on the summit agenda items. This is being done with recognition that all decisions at the United Nations are *political* decisions, made by national governments, thus making

the processes slower and more difficult than might be ideal. In any deliberative or negotiating process, it is far easier to find reasons to delay and consider further than to reach a decision. Too often, this allows the “perfect” to drive out the “good.” Too often, this fosters continuing absence of a decision when almost any decision would be better than none.

We are fortunate that President Eliasson and his cochairs have accepted their present roles. Effective leadership of this General Assembly process is vitally important. At the same time, all involved need to approach this undertaking with a bias toward decision and action. The stakes are too high and the summit directions are too explicit for anything but expeditious implementation.

The Peacebuilding Commission has been established to steer recovery efforts in war-torn countries; the commission will fill the critical need for coherent priorities and plans. Work remains on election of its members and providing resources for the Peace-building Support Office.

The new Human Rights Council—regarded by many as the centerpiece of the push for a stronger and more credible United Nations—has been hotly contested and is nearing final agreement. This is extremely important as a test of member-state cooperation on a pillar of the UN Charter and its ideal of “larger freedom.”

Other summit agenda items are in process and will reach general debate as preparations are completed.

In our discussions here at the Castle on the Hudson we will focus on one part of the Outcome Document recommendations—management reform, including review of mandates and rules and regulations. While political decisions are involved, organizational effectiveness is the goal in these areas. Beyond this, there

is the overall credibility of the world body. The United Nations can serve as an instrument of peace and justice only if it enjoys basic confidence, and the Oil-for-Food and sexual abuse scandals have severely eroded that confidence.

So UN management needs to do a better job, and they know it. The member states also need to do a better job in seeking and supporting stronger management, and they too are aware of their responsibilities. Indeed, world leaders said as much in the September summit Outcome Document, and I quote:

Bearing in mind our responsibility as Member States, we emphasize the need to decide on additional reforms in order to make more efficient use of the financial and human resources available to the Organization and thus better comply with its principles, objectives and mandates.

The goals of management reform include giving the secretary-general the management tools he needs to run the organization efficiently and effectively. They include terms like *accountability*, *transparency*, and *best use of resources*. Some of the changes that the leaders called for have already been implemented. The new ethics office has been created. Protections have been put in place for whistleblowers. The push to enforce zero-tolerance of sexual abuse has been redoubled. The structures for oversight, audit, and accounting have been strengthened.

The next management steps are the subject of this conference. Two of the summit decisions in particular are being prepared for debate and negotiation in the General Assembly: the review of mandates older than five years and the review of rules and regulations governing budgetary, financial, and personnel matters.

In the two days we will be together, we do not expect to delve into the substance of mandates, rules, and regulations. Such discussion is best

left to the official channels. Our aim here is to help frame a constructive approach and process that will lead to expeditious and effective handling of the substance. In this and other areas, it is vital to preserve the momentum for renewal that has been generated. I know that in the management area, you are working under particular pressure from the budget process. But with application of political will, it should be possible to complete the mandate and rules and regulations reviews by midyear.

As mentioned, the purpose of our conference is to look at how the member states can review mandates and rules and regulations to reach a positive and widely supported outcome. The review of mandates very much illustrates the dual political and organizational nature of the United Nations. These are the tasks that member states have given to their staff. They also illustrate one of the United Nations' persistent problems—the indiscriminate attention to actions great and small (some very small indeed) with insufficient sense of proportion or priority.

Mindful of all these considerations, and the need for broad agreement, how can the General Assembly proceed on the review of mandates? The review faces management challenges of its own, given the sheer numbers—literally thousands—of mandates. Our discussion outline raises a number of questions for the process going forward. What do member states want to accomplish in the review—what will constitute success? How can the decks be cleared of inactive mandates on which no work at all is being done? How should overlapping mandates from the different UN principal organs be handled? What about the relationship of mandates less than five years old (not formally covered by the Outcome Document)? What is the best way to deal with the most sensitive and controversial mandates? These will need to be discussed, but also prevented from completely bogging down the effort.

For the review of rules and regulations, we have general questions about objectives. We note two significant changes in the decades since the United Nations' founding. In the past 15-20 years especially, the United Nations has become much more involved in on-the-ground operations. What management adjustments are needed in response? Technology and the practice of organizational management have also changed dramatically. What responses should be made?

I hope our discussion will generate ideas for these challenges and make a positive contribution to the General Assembly's deliberations.



## Conference Report

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In September 2005 world leaders assembled at the United Nations in New York to decide how best to update the world body to deal with the global challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century. The centerpiece of the summit was an ambitious Outcome Document, whose ideas were generated through a multi-year series of UN-sponsored reports.

The Outcome Document focused on four priority areas: development, peace and collective security, human rights and the rule of law, and strengthening UN management. In the months following the summit, member states have tried to sustain momentum for change by starting to implement the proposals endorsed by leaders at the summit. In December the General Assembly authorized the creation of a Peacebuilding Commission to strengthen UN efforts to assist countries in the task of rebuilding in the aftermath of war. Discussions also came to a head on the proposed Human Rights Council as member states tried to bridge differences on the parameters of the new council in advance of the March annual session of the Human Rights Commission, which it seeks to replace.

These developments are a welcome sign that UN renewal is on track. But the element of the reform package that is perhaps most critical to bolstering public confidence in the United Nations is the reform of UN management, budgetary, accountability and transparency mechanisms. In the wake of the Oil-for-Food inquiry and numerous sexual abuse scandals, the United Nations' management has come under severe criticism. Since September, though, much progress has been made in updating the management structure. Acting on guidance from the summit Outcome

Document, the secretary-general is hard at work on two new reports that will provide the blueprint for additional reform initiatives: the review of mandates and rules and regulations.

In order to generate a consensus on these two important areas of management reform, the Stanley Foundation convened a group of 25 permanent representatives, high-level Secretariat representatives, and outside experts at the Castle on the Hudson in Tarrytown, New York, on February 17-19, 2006. The objective of the group's deliberations was to chart a course for the membership to work with the Secretariat to strengthen the system in these two critical areas: the review of mandates older than five years and the review of the rules, regulations, and policies that govern budgetary, financial, and personnel matters.

Discussions on reforming a complex organization are bound to prompt numerous substantive disputes as well as misunderstandings, but conference participants identified some broad approaches that could facilitate a constructive debate. Areas of possible consensus included: "rules of the road" for the respective reviews; some general objectives of mandate review and the different categories of mandates; priorities for strengthening rules, regulations, and policies; and finally, a rough process going forward once the secretary-general's reports are in hand.

### Where Are We?

The participants at Castle on the Hudson gave a cautiously optimistic assessment of the progress on strengthening UN management. They affirmed the centrality of management for the success of overall renewal of the United Nations. This is critical both internally for the membership and UN staff and externally for

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The rapporteur prepared this report following the conference. It contains his interpretation of the proceedings and is not merely a descriptive, chronological account. Participants neither reviewed nor approved the report. Therefore, it should not be assumed that every participant subscribes to all recommendations, observations, and conclusions.

opinion-makers, governments, and national constituencies.

### **“Rules of the Road”**

Taking care not to delve too deeply into substantive or procedural details, participants began the conference by noting a consensus that had already emerged around four basic principles or “rules of the road” for discussions on management reform. This consensus had emerged in the initial consultations and discussions both in New York and in various government capitals.

First, member states as well as the Secretariat agree that reform of the United Nations is a problem that concerns everybody affiliated with the institution and not just a few member states. Ownership of the UN renewal process is thus shared, a sentiment that must be consistently communicated both inside and outside the United Nations.

Second, all parties involved in the negotiations must work to “take the drama out of the proceedings.” One participant lamented that the upcoming report of the Secretariat on mandate review and the resulting reaction and response of member states is being hyped by some delegations as a major showdown between two opposing parties. To the contrary, the process of management reform is a rational exercise in which all sides share a stake.

Third, the member states must make a concerted effort to change public perceptions of management reform. Some participants worried that, to the outside world, the mere fact of the tens of thousands of mandates given to the Secretariat over the years would reinforce superficial stereotypes. Therefore, domestic constituencies must be reminded that the dredging up of these mandates is the first step toward ensuring a better alignment of mandates and operational functions of the United Nations and, therefore, a better-managed institution.

Finally, all parties must take concrete steps to reduce the mistrust and misperception that have surrounded the reform effort. Several participants contended that if the process is managed effectively and sensitively, management reform can act as a catalyst to bring the Secretariat and the member states closer together than ever before. As one participant remarked, mistrust among member states and between the membership and the Secretariat must be allayed because at the end of the day, “we sink or swim together.”

### **Areas of Consensus**

Moving beyond these four underlying principles, an early consensus has also emerged on a few key points of priority and objectives.

There is general consensus that member states should focus on evaluating active mandates. Inactive or “moribund” mandates should not be the focus of discussions as their obsolescence and fate should be self-evident. In addition, there is general agreement that each of the United Nations’ organs should be responsible for reviewing its own mandates—to avoid having, for instance, the Security Council pass judgment on the mandates of the General Assembly or vice versa.

Based on early discussions led by the president of the General Assembly’s two cochairs for management reform, there is broad consensus on what the purpose of the mandate review process *is not*. It has been stressed widely that the review of mandates is not a cost-cutting exercise. Furthermore, the goal of mandate review is not to second-guess the substantive purpose behind any given mandate. Having said that, where instances of inefficiency and wasteful overlap are identified, they should be addressed.

### **Areas of Disagreement**

While there is some clarity on what the objectives are not, there is not yet full agreement on



what the objectives of the mandate review *are*. Participants reported that the disputes over the objectives of management reform have been the principal hindrance to the debate thus far. The language in the Outcome Document calling for mandate review was described as “extremely sparse,” and differences in interpretation will need to at least be clarified *prior* to the release of the Secretariat’s report.

In addition to the problem of setting agreed objectives, participants listed five other areas where consensus has been elusive. If these issues remain contentious, several participants worried that timely and decisive progress on both reviews could be delayed.

First, there are differences over the scope of the mandate review. For instance, member states have differing interpretations of what constitutes a “five-year-old” mandate. How should the membership treat mandates that are older than five years but which have been reaffirmed? Several members of the group also raised the issue of whether to extend the review to those mandates issued by subsidiary organs of main bodies, particularly the specialized agencies, funds, and programs.

Second, there is as yet no common understanding for precisely how the review will be carried out—employing what methodology to be decided by whom? It is assumed that a common set of criteria should be applied to the evaluation of mandates, yet it is unclear what the specific methodology should be, who should develop it, and the extent to which it is even possible to develop generic “decision-drivers.”

Third, there is a common belief that there is not yet a firm understanding regarding the channels and form for member states’ responses to the forthcoming reports of the Secretariat on both mandates as well as rules and regulations. Many participants expressed doubt concerning the practicality of having all 191 members ana-

lyze both reports in detail. Furthermore, participants raised fundamental questions such as how to measure progress, how to define success, and what form outcomes should take. Even assuming the review of mandates is successful, one participant worried aloud that the United Nations would not be able to ensure that it does not end up in the same situation 10 to 15 years from now with further proliferation of mandates, many of them outdated or duplicative.

Fourth, there is still confusion over the timeline of completing work on the reviews. Some argue that the spending cap (under which major contributing nations have held back the organization’s budget for the second half of 2006 contingent on reform progress) will help catalyze action and not let member states slip into the usual pattern of delay and indecision. Others argue that the cap attempts to coerce member states to abide by an artificial timeline. Numerous participants, though, believed that if clear progress is made by midyear, the cap might be lifted—even without completion of the mandate review process, which due to its sheer complexity would be very difficult to finish by the end of June.

Finally, all participants raised concerns about how best to handle “politically sensitive” mandates. The elephant in the room, participants acknowledged, are the mandates involving Palestine. Yet several participants cautioned that a clear process would be needed to cover all such mandates or else there would be numerous demands for exceptions from a variety of directions.

## **Mandate Review**

### **Status of Forthcoming Secretariat Report**

Once the report of the Secretariat on mandate review is formally delivered to member states, a political process will commence—under the aegis of the General Assembly—to assess the

report, discuss and debate its contents, and develop an implementation plan for rationalizing mandates. Participants hoped that the data in the Secretariat's report would reveal problem areas where the member states might focus their attention in order to consolidate, eliminate, or otherwise augment the thousands of Secretariat mandates under review.

In many ways, the centerpiece of the report will be a user-friendly database that will serve as a comprehensive inventory of mandates. By virtue of the complexity and sheer volume of the information that will need to be digested and scrutinized by the General Assembly, mandate review is likely to be a daunting task. In particular, participants highlighted four challenges member states can anticipate:

- **Volume and Diversity.** The database developed by the Secretariat will include tens of thousands of mandates adopted over a 55-year time period. While there is now a general consensus that the review will focus on active mandates (a smaller subset, but which still numbers in the thousands), different parties have different definitions for what constitutes an "active" mandate. For its part, the Secretariat considers a mandate active if it fulfills one of three criteria: it has appeared on a UN body's agenda in the past five years, it has received an allocation in the budget, or if any program manager has affirmed that he/she is working on the mandate. On the question of historical mandates, the group's general view was that the Secretariat should not invest too much of its time in sorting through historical mandates, except to ensure member states can access them for background and research purposes.
- **Gap Between Mandates and Resources.** Given the proliferation of mandates over the years, a pattern has emerged whereby mandates have mushroomed without a commensurate growth in resources. In reviewing the Secretariat's report, member states can assess how best to address the growing problem of the gap between mandates and existing resources.
- **Overlap Between Mandates.** One complication of mandate overlap (and possible conflict) is their application over the years. Assuming each principal organ will have primary responsibility for reviewing its own mandates, these bodies will have to cooperate in order to harmonize those mandates that overlap and *are not* complementary. Participants emphasized that overlap per se is not a negative; in fact, the exercise may bring about a better division of labor between organs as member states will have to discuss the comparative advantages of various organs on certain issues.<sup>1</sup>
- **Reporting Requirements.** As a vivid example of the problems associated with mandate proliferation, there is a growing recognition of the related problem of "report proliferation." As is widely acknowledged but little appreciated, almost every mandate issued by a principal organ includes a reporting requirement placed on the Secretariat; this cumulative effects of reporting has led to a serious burden on Secretariat staff. An overwhelming majority of program managers interviewed by the Secretariat has reported that the staff and resource burden of reports is a significant drain and that member states should focus on the duplication, repetition, and frequency of reports in their review of mandates.

<sup>1</sup> While in most cases mandates originating from subsidiary bodies are channeled to the respective principal organ, there are many cases of mandates emerging from subsidiary bodies that incur resources but have never been formally ratified by their principal organs. It is unclear how the review of these "proto-mandates" should proceed.

### Objectives of Mandate Review

While initial debate on management reform in the General Assembly has been split over purpose and aims of mandate review, in our conference discussions participants openly addressed their mutual perceptions and mistrust and found that important areas of potential agreement emerged. To begin with, the group pointed toward a single objective for the exercise: to review the implementation of mandates with an eye toward achieving greater effectiveness and attaining the United Nations' ultimate goals in the world. In other words, the review should contribute toward sound management, on behalf of all member states and the Secretariat by clarifying the current activities of the UN organization.

Second, as one participant put it: "UN reform is not about creating a UN that delivers less; it is about establishing a UN that delivers better." Much of the conference discussion focused on the question of resources. The key to building trust and momentum for a constructive review process, it quickly became clear, is to dispel fears that the real agenda of management reform is to cut budgets and shift priorities. To counter this perception, commitments of varying levels could be made to preserve existing resources for existing priorities.

The first of these commitments is that member states could agree that the mandate review *will not* result in a rebate to donors or an overall reduced budget. But even such an understanding might not allay the fears (particularly in the G-77) that developed countries view mandate review as an opportunity to shift resources from development to Western priorities such as terrorism or nonproliferation. To build further confidence, member states could stipulate that any efficiencies or savings resulting from the review be recaptured for the same or similar purposes. In this approach, member states would decide how to group mandates thematically in order to leave resource commitments

intact. The aim would be to optimize, rather than decrease, resources for development.

Committing to such a compromise would be one element of a potential package of confidence-building measures. With an initial focus on the implementation and effectiveness of mandates, decisions to discontinue and/or combine mandates could come later and be informed by the first phase. It would also be important to postpone the political "hot-button issues" for action in a later phase after sufficient confidence in the process had accumulated. Attacking the issue in a phased approach such as this would extend timelines beyond what has been anticipated, though several participants believed that doing so would actually increase the effectiveness of the process in the long run.

Following a phased approach would also increase the likelihood that tangible changes could be achieved by June, when talks on resolving the budget cap are expected to occur. Tangible reform steps will undoubtedly help convince the United Nations' major contributors that the process of renewing UN management is well under way.

### Current Active Mandates— Five Years or Older

In discussions thus far in New York, there has been considerable disagreement over what constitutes a "current" active mandate. The crux of the disagreement is a technical argument that the renewal of a mandate actually constitutes the establishment of a new mandate. A small but insistent minority of participants was quite firm in this interpretation. So while some argue that a mandate first created 20 years ago but renewed within the past 5 years is a "new" mandate, others argue that a mandate older than 5 years (renewed or not) should not be considered a new mandate. Although the Outcome Document leaves some room for interpretation given the routine, nearly automatic

manner in which mandates are often renewed, it is difficult to see these as truly new mandates. The task is also complicated by the lack of recent precedent, although one participant argued that the current effort was not unprecedented: in 1953-54, then-Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld instituted a review of Secretariat mandates.<sup>2</sup>

As was pointed out by one participant, the vast majority of mandates have been renewed within the past five years, so restricting the member states' inquiry to only those mandates that have not been renewed would mean examining a relatively small set of mandates. Several members of the group argued that if the entire mandate review endeavor resulted in only examining a tiny fraction of total mandates, it would be a rather "hollow exercise." To illustrate this point, one participant made an analogy to UN peacekeeping mandates, which are regularly renewed by the Security Council using almost the exact same language each time. One would not say that the 27-year-old peacekeeping mission in Sinai is a new mandate simply because it was renewed in the past year.

Others responded to this line of argument by contending that the Outcome Document is quite clear in stipulating that the task of the member states is to "review mandates older than five years." Deviating from this guidance would "open up a whole new can of worms" that could derail and prolong the process.

Some participants tried to steer the group away from the "five-year" dichotomy, arguing that such an approach was likely to be divisive and provide ammunition for those who seek to "play politics" with the process. One participant made an impassioned plea for member states to focus on the mandates themselves and

letting "the data speak for itself." Once member states look at mandates within a theme or programmatic cluster, it will become clear that the proliferation of mandates has led to duplication and repetition, wheel-spinning, and overall incoherence—all of which need to be rectified by the mandate review. Taking such a holistic approach, it was argued, would necessarily require looking at the totality of information (including mandates old and new) in order to make an informed decision on rationalizing mandates in a given area.

The discussion turned again to a phased approach, especially given the fact that the information from the Secretariat was not even compiled yet. One participant dubbed the discussion over the five-year threshold a "nondebate"; the logical solution is to tackle the problem using a phased approach. First, member states must deal with mandates older than five years which have not been renewed. Then, if sufficient confidence is built, member states could examine those mandates that were first established more than five years ago but that have been renewed more recently. Finally, if phases one and two proceed apace, member states could choose to deal with the newest mandates.

### **Overlapping Mandates**

On the subject of overlapping mandates, virtually all participants agreed on two central points. First, there was universal agreement that overlap between principal organs was considerable and out of control. One participant used the example of HIV/AIDS as a typical issue on which every organ deems it necessary to take action irrespective of what others in and outside the United Nations may already have under way.

<sup>2</sup> The Hammarskjöld review was guided by five key questions or criteria: (1) Can the UN Secretariat perform its functions effectively? (2) Is the Secretariat meeting urgent needs that are vital to the functioning of the UN? (3) Could Secretariat functions be more effectively performed by national action? (4) Has the importance of a given mandate diminished or are new directions called for? (5) Has full account been taken of the work already carried out either nationally or internationally?

Second, most participants clarified that overlap does not in and of itself hinder efficient and effective action. A problem arises when mandates are both overlapping *and* redundant.

In terms of the process that should be employed in order to reconcile and rationalize overlapping mandates among different UN bodies, one participant thought that the managers of the process should be creative and experimental. One suggested approach was instituting a regular meeting of the presidents of the General Assembly, Security Council, and ECOSOC to facilitate the development and implementation of identical approaches to mandate review. Such a periodic conference of the three could be handled informally but it would ensure that each of the three main bodies' equities is adequately respected.

### **Rules and Regulations Review**

In addition to its forthcoming report on mandate review, the Secretariat is working on a comprehensive report—also requested by the Outcome Document—that will summarize the secretary-general's review of rules, regulations, and policies governing the UN system as a whole. Over the past few decades, and especially within the last ten years, the Secretariat has become much more operational. This is a function of the changing times and the leadership of the Secretariat as well as a response to the desires of member states. Yet the Secretariat has not adjusted its organizational model to reflect this new reality.

The slate of suggested changes to be put forward by the Secretariat will be a package of items, some of which can be acted upon right away, while others will require considerable debate and further detail that will be worked out over the next few years. Conference discussion centered around four topics that are widely expected to be the main issues of the forthcoming report of the Secretariat: high-level leader-

ship within the Secretariat, human resources, finance and budget, and a cluster of issues under the rubric of general management issues.

### **Leadership at the Top**

The secretary-general is expected to offer two particular recommendations to his successor in this regard (merely as suggestions, since their implementation will be the prerogative of the new secretary-general). The first is a recommendation to use the post of deputy secretary-general (DSG) as a day-to-day manager of operational activities. A few participants expressed concern that this recommendation is virtually identical to the idea of a "chief operating officer"—an idea that has been rejected by some delegations as smacking too much of the private sector.

Others contended that the recommendation of the secretary-general is a practical measure to provide some line authority to the DSG over some under secretaries-general and remove some of the managerial burden of the secretary-general. One participant cautioned that the next secretary-general would need to strike a delicate balance between delegating to the DSG and channeling everything through the DSG, which would only add an extra layer of bureaucracy.

The second suggestion is to reorganize the Secretariat in order to reduce the number of people who report directly to the secretary-general by clustering some entities around a senior thematic under secretary-general. For instance, the heads of UN headquarters in New York, Vienna, and Geneva (all of whom currently report directly to the secretary-general) could report to the new secretary-general through the under secretary-general for management. Yet another possibility is for the heads of the regional economic commissions to report to the secretary-general through the under secretary-general for economic and social affairs (ESA).



## Human Resources

Several members of the group acknowledged that human resources (HR) reforms will be the most complex of the lot, because they are intended to adjust the skills and priorities of the Secretariat to the reality that there are far more employees of the Secretariat working outside of headquarters than there are inside. It was emphasized that the Secretariat must find a way to integrate this “floating population” of employees in the field into a comprehensive approach to HR management.

There was a general sense among participants that many people employed outside of headquarters feel disconnected from the center and that there are few incentives for Secretariat staff to serve outside of headquarters. Several participants urged the secretary-general to find a way to encourage staff mobility between headquarters and the field. One concept is to create a “cadre” of staff who regularly rotate out to the field; there is also an idea to have a cadre that rotates among the United Nations’ different departments, agencies, funds, and programs.<sup>3</sup> In order to build a system that no longer treats people in the field as “transient personnel,” the Secretariat will be required to make estimates for planning purposes of how many posts are anticipated to be outside of headquarters for the foreseeable future.<sup>4</sup>

Irrespective of absolute numbers, a few participants criticized the contracting procedures currently in place for Secretariat personnel in the field. One example that was raised is the fact that the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is precluded from negotiating contracts that exceed the

amount of cash it has on hand. Because contributions to OCHA are on an annual cycle, most OCHA employees are forced to accept one-year contracts. This, despite the reasonable expectation that OCHA will receive annual contributions every year—against which one can make sensible human resource projections. Another recommendation on personnel that the secretary-general is expected to propose is the standardization of benefits across the UN system so that all staff in the Secretariat, funds, and programs are treated similarly.

Several participants encouraged the secretary-general to make the system of recruitment more transparent and geared toward talent outside of the United Nations rather than merely “cherry-picking” staff already within the UN system. The current system was described by some participants as a “fortress” or a “system with merely the façade of openness.” While recent improvements in the system were acknowledged (thanks in part to a previous round of recruitment reforms), one participant argued that the Secretariat must be more proactive in its recruiting efforts. It is expected that the secretary-general’s report will recommend a recruiting strategy that will call for a more proactive approach out in the various regions themselves. Several participants applauded this effort, arguing that doing so would preserve the diversity of the Secretariat, which is widely regarded as one of its biggest assets.

## Finance and Budget

Among participants, there was a feeling that while the rules regarding finance and budgetary processes currently in place are by and

<sup>3</sup> This is similar to an idea that emerged in a 2003 Stanley Foundation report *UN on the Ground*. A study group of humanitarian experts stressed the value of staff who understand the approaches and capacities of the different agencies and proposed a special career track that would facilitate the mobility of certain staff and ensure their career development.

<sup>4</sup> On a cautionary note, however, one participant raised the prospect that current demands for personnel in the field (based in part on the record number of peacekeeping operations under way around the globe) may at some point start declining due to greater involvement of regional organizations or perhaps decreased demand (and the winding down of some high-profile missions).



large reasonable, their implementation merits further review. The secretary-general is expected to recommend a shortening of the budget decision cycle so that the budget is introduced later in the year, thereby ensuring that the budget is as closely matched as possible to the actual period it is intended to cover. While a few participants wondered if taking such steps might alter the member states' role in the budgetary process, several participants responded that the only alteration would be in the amount of time the membership would have to approve the budget. The role and responsibilities of the membership would not be subject to change. In a similar vein to the mandate review discussion, there is also a proposal to consolidate budgets for some thematic areas to give greater flexibility.

### Management Issues

Several issues were tabled for discussion under the general rubric of "management issues." First, participants debated the merits of outsourcing and off-shoring some Secretariat responsibilities where gains could be realized and certainty of supply could be assured. Under existing regulations issued by the General Assembly, the Secretariat is precluded from exploring either option. In its forthcoming report, the Secretariat is expected to sketch out a small number of operations that might be subject to out-sourcing or off-shoring. Any plan, it was recognized, must be subject to a thorough analysis with respect to the advantages/disadvantages, costs, reliability of service, quality, and so forth.

While there was a general feeling that there is likely to be more potential for cost-cutting and efficiency gains by geographically shifting some administrative functions (off-shoring) rather than contracting them outside the system (out-sourcing), several participants endorsed the view that these options should be explored where appropriate. One participant noted the World Bank's shift of its payroll function to India as part of an off-shoring initiative.

Finally, it is expected that the secretary-general will clarify his proposal regarding a staff buy-out program, a tool that could be at the disposal of the next secretary-general, allowing him/her to spur the renewal of talent within the organization and to achieve a better alignment of staff skills with member state mandates. There were a few questions about the goal of the secretary-general in proposing a staff buy-out plan, and it was argued that the primary goal should be realignment, *not reduction*, in staff. While a reduction in costs may be a byproduct of such a scheme, the primary goal should be to achieve a better alignment between resources and needs.

### Looking Ahead

Participants concluded their discussion at Castle on the Hudson by discussing the next steps in anticipation of the secretary-general's two reports.

First, participants encouraged the president of the General Assembly and his two cochairs to lay a foundation of broader confidence and trust among member states. One concrete proposal was to seek agreement on a short (four or five paragraphs) statement of principles that could spell out the common objectives of the membership: building a United Nations that will do better, not less; preserving the resources devoted to thematic clusters of mandates and recapturing any savings; and eliminating inefficiencies and waste where necessary. In the same document, member states could agree on a general sequence going forward that would build confidence—in line with the phased process idea developed in the conference discussions.

Second, participants agreed that the secretary-general could play a crucial guiding role throughout the review process. There was a consensus that the secretary-general should formally introduce both reports to the entire plenary and stay engaged after the delivery of the report. The secretary-general should

continue his pattern of question-and-answer sessions with different regional groupings in smaller, off-the-record settings. This would help not only to clarify areas of confusion but also to keep the permanent representatives engaged on a personal level.

With respect to the review of mandates, the secretary-general's greatest contribution will be to offer a clear analysis and set of recommendations, as requested by the Outcome Document. Some participants thought that it would be important to make a clear statement of the operational assumptions the Secretariat used in compiling and analyzing the data—such as a straightforward definition of the parameters it followed. Participants also argued that sufficient time should be given to all member states to digest and fully understand the material. This will be especially important for smaller missions who may not have the staff on hand to quickly decipher the data provided by the Secretariat.

Third, it is widely anticipated that the membership will ask the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions for its analysis. There was general consensus that their expert input will be needed. There was concern about the process bogging down in these bodies at significant cost to the momentum for reform. Pointing to the recent example of the ethics office, one participant observed that even an issue as obvious and straightforward as the creation of a United Nations Ethics Office was the subject of much discord and disagreement within the Fifth Committee.

The key to avoiding any such breakdown in the process, said conference participants, is for the permanent representatives themselves to “guard against the abuse of process” by setting timelines and working very closely with their Fifth Committee delegates. Going further, participants thought it would be critical for the

ambassadors themselves to attend the Fifth Committee discussions, thereby ensuring political oversight of the process. Doing so would demonstrate that what is at stake is not merely a technical issue, but a matter that concerns the future vision of the organization as a whole.

To ensure a timely process, some participants thought that the approach taken with the low-hanging fruit emerging from the summit Outcome Document could be replicated. In that process, the General Assembly issued clear guidance and a timetable to the Fifth Committee—asking it to report back on certain dates and in a carefully sequenced way. Such a process, it was broadly felt, kept the reform objectives alive and on time.

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