



STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF THE GROUP OF 77 AND CHINA BY AMBASSADOR DUMISANI S. KUMALO, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 123: HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT, IN THE FIFTH COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY (New York, 30 October 2006)

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China wishes to express our appreciation to the Secretary General Mr. Kofi Annan, for introducing his report on “Investing in People” (A/61/255). We welcome the efforts to respond to resolution 60/260 and we believe that the report provides a good basis for our consultations.

We also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management, Ms Jan Beagle, and the Director, ad interim, of the Ethics Office, Ms. Nancy Hertz-Soyka, for introducing the relevant reports of the Secretary-General on human resources management reform and the Ethics Office. The Group furthermore wishes to thank the Chairman of Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, Mr. Rajat Saha, for his introduction of the report of the Advisory Committee. We appreciate the presentation by Mr. Oleg Kiiamov of the Coordinating Committee of International Staff Unions and Associations.

The Group of 77 and China applauds the Secretary-General for his long standing commitment and the efforts he continues to deploy to effect a continuous transformation of the United Nation’s human resources framework, in order to better position the Organization to cope with the current challenges. It is indeed a noble effort and we are proud to have been supportive of his reform initiatives from their inception in 1997.

The United Nations today has to deliver more complex and difficult mandates in all fields. The efficient and effective delivery of these mandates fundamentally hinges on the quality of its staff and the availability of resources. To this end, ensuring the well being of our international civil servants is of the utmost importance to the Group of 77 and China and has informed our support of all reform measures aimed at establishing a satisfied, vibrant and dynamic workforce for our Organisation.

The Group of 77 and China will continue to support measures aimed at ensuring the best possible conditions of service for United Nations staff. To this end, we note that staff in peacekeeping operations, who work in the most difficult conditions, is not satisfied with the current conditions of service. The Group will strive to find ways to mitigate these concerns through appropriate reforms.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China supports the primary oversight role performed by the General Assembly. We support and fully respect the responsibilities entrusted by the Charter to the Secretary-General as the Chief Administrative Officer. We, however, do not support the assertion that the General Assembly is constraining the Secretary-General from performing this role and we trust that this debate will not detract from our consideration of the important proposals before us.

The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the attainment of key benchmarks for reforms. To this end, we believe that more needs to be done in order to ensure that United Nations staff meets the highest standards of ethics, fairness, transparency and accountability, high performance, managerial excellence and respect for diversity. The Group intends to focus on these aspects during the informal consultations with a view to adopting appropriate measures to ensure the achievement of these key goals.

Human resources management reform has been an ongoing process and we appreciate the reflection on some of the main achievements of the building block approach to HRM reforms. These include the establishment of human resources planning and monitoring, introduction of electronic performance management system, streamlining of rules and procedures, staff selection through delegation of responsibility to department heads, introduction of staff mobility policy and integration of core competencies and values into human resources systems. We acknowledge that the results have varied and we look forward to strengthening past reform measures where needed.

Mr. Chairman,

The current decentralized system of recruitment requires our careful consideration. While recruitment revolves around managerial discretion, programme managers for years have not been held accountable for failure to meet

human resources action plans' targets for appointing staff who did not meet the core competencies. We believe that this aspect should be addressed.

The Group believes that central review bodies should be empowered to fully discharge their responsibilities as envisaged by the General Assembly. This is an important aspect of ensuring accountability and transparency in the recruitment and selection process. The concerns raised by the Staff Union regarding the role of the central review bodies seem to suggest that the latter objective has not been achieved. We consequently hold the view that it would be prudent to define the terms of reference of the Central Review Bodies and their role in the recruitment and selection process more clearly.

The Group of 77 and China maintains that other important elements of the recruitment and selection process deserve careful reflection. In this regard, the roster of pre-screened candidates has to be used in a fair manner to expeditiously fill field missions' posts. The galaxy system should be improved so to enable the United Nations to meet its operational needs. Promotion in the Organisation, which currently revolves around performance criteria, should be adequately complemented with sufficient safeguards to prevent discrimination and promotion of personal preferences.

We believe that better planning and coordination among the related departments in the United Nations will expedite recruitment. We are not convinced that reducing the advertising time will improve recruitment objectives and processes, as it may significantly undermine the ability of qualified and interested candidates from the developing countries to fairly compete for vacancies as they occur. The Group would, nonetheless, be amenable to discussing ways to relax these conditions to enable critical appointments to be made to meet defined urgent needs and exigencies of work of the Organisation.

We note the proposal to establish a dedicated unit within the Department of Human Resources Management to assist programme managers in the selection and recruitment of staff. We look forward to discussing the details and modalities of this proposal during the informal consultations.

Mr. Chairman,

The concept of staff mobility is another useful tool that can be employed to further meet the diverse and competing demands on the Organisation. We believe that, in keeping with the previous General Assembly resolutions, mobility should apply to all categories of staff, including professional and higher posts. Moreover, while it would be advisable for mobility to remain voluntary, its application must be accompanied with incentives, such as financial, opportunities for promotion and payment of hardship allowances. All staff should have an equal opportunity to move to and from headquarters.

We should ensure that mobility is not used as a coercive measure and staff should be able to manage their own careers. It should be done in consultation with staff associations and phased in a manner that will not undermine the institutional memory and management of the concerned department. Mobility should also not be utilised to move posts across departments and the staffing table should remain intact.

The Group of 77 and China attaches great importance to the training of staff. We agree with the Secretary-General that there is a need for the Organisation to strengthen its investment in staff development and we are willing to support the full amount requested by the Secretary-General for training. Training programmes should be designed to fulfill the operational and functional needs of the Organisation and must be externally certified. Training programmes should add value to the knowledge and skills of staff members and they should have equal access to training opportunities.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China remains seriously concerned over the continued failure of the Organisation to meet the agreed benchmarks on equitable geographic and gender distribution in the Secretariat. The number of unrepresented and under-represented countries for many years has not shown any significant improvement. The share of female appointments from developing countries is even lower.

We note that existing measures, such as conduct of special competitive exams, the preferential use of pre-screened candidates from developing countries, and special recruitment missions to under and unrepresented countries, have not fully met set targets. This situation should be rectified. We would urge that, henceforth, programme managers and senior management who fail to implement the benchmarks identified in the HR Action Plans should be held accountable.

Currently, senior management positions in important departments seem to be the exclusive preserve of some Member States. This is contrary to several General Assembly resolutions and immediate remedial action is needed. We urge the Secretariat to use vacancies arising from the large-scale retirements that will occur in different categories by the year 2010 in a strategic manner so as to improve the international character of the Organisation. We also trust that the Performance Management Board will take effective measures to rectify the noted shortcomings. The Group of 77 and China, furthermore, will request that quarterly updates be submitted to the General Assembly on this issue.

Mr. Chairman,

The Group of 77 and China looks forward to receiving further elaboration on the proposal to designate 2,500 career peacekeeping positions for functions in the various occupational groups at professional and field service levels. We trust that issues, such as the configuration of the different occupational groups, post levels, and the impact on the geographic and gender criteria, will be clarified.

On harmonisation of conditions of service, the Group of 77 and China has taken note of the proposal to introduce one United Nations staff contract under one set of staff rules. It will be recalled that we have always been supportive of more fair and equitable conditions of service for all categories of staff. In view of the significant financial impact and implications for existing geographical composition of the Secretariat, we concur that it would be prudent to receive the outcome report of the study to be undertaken by the International Civil Services Commission before taking a final decision. We trust that the study will be completed as a matter of priority.

Turning to accountability measures, the Group of 77 and China reiterates that the General Assembly, in several resolutions, has restated its concern over the lack of a well-defined accountability framework in the Organisation. The current system is fragmented, difficult to comprehend and has not been implemented fully. We are concerned by indications that clear guidelines to hold programme managers accountable for failures have not been implemented. We believe that it is imperative to adopt concrete measures to improve accountability before delegating further authority to programme managers.

We, furthermore, believe that the system of internal justice in the Organisation should be more transparent and fair. We consequently look forward to considering the recommendations of the Redesign Panel on Internal Justice later in the session.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, the Group of 77 and China believes that a proper framework for consultations with Staff representatives on all HRM reforms is imperative. The perception of mistrust between management and staff is regrettable and harmful to the image of the Organisation. We trust that every effort will be made to improve staff and management relations. The Group also looks forward to hearing the views of all staff representatives on the various proposals, especially those contained in the two reports referred to by Assistant Secretary-General Ms. Jan Beagle.

We also wish to thank the dedicated staff members who serve the Organisation from all corners of the world. We pay tribute to those who have given their lives to this Organisation. Their memory can only be best served by conducting full and complete consultations on the needs and concerns of the rest of the UN staff.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.