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135th IPU ASSEMBLY AND RELATED MEETINGS

Geneva, 23 – 27.10.2016

Report of the Standing Committee on United Nations Affairs

*Noted by the 135th IPU Assembly
(Geneva, 27 October 2016)*

The President introduced two new appointments to the Bureau, Ms. B. Sampatisiri (Thailand) and Mr. D. Asylbek uulu (Kyrgyzstan), and invited the Committee to formally elect these members by acclamation.

Pursuant to Standing Committee Rule 10.2, the President further proposed that a Bureau recommendation to replace Ms. I. Montenegro (Nicaragua) for failure to participate in meetings be adopted by the Committee. As no objection was raised, the Committee agreed with this recommendation.

The President then proceeded to open the plenary debate, which consisted of two sessions.

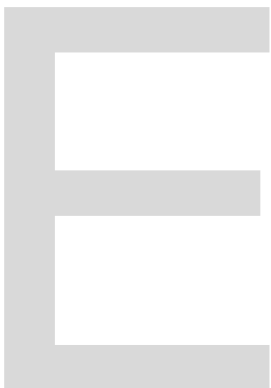
The following panellists took part in the first session, *Funding the United Nations*: Mr. R. Lalli, Secretary, High-level Committee on Management (HLCM), United Nations, Ms. B. Adams, Board Member, Global Policy Forum, Ms. E. Nursanty, MP, Indonesia, Ms G. Ortiz, Senator, Mexico

Mr. Lalli began the session with a presentation outlining the key facts and figures of the UN funding model and building on a comprehensive background note prepared by the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs. A total of 15 interventions, including two from UN entities (UNDP and OCHA), were heard in the ensuing debate.

Over the past two decades, the UN funding model had become over-dependent on earmarked, voluntary funding from relatively few donor countries, as well as a growing number of non-government donors (e.g. the Gates Foundation). This pattern obtained across the entire system of over 30 entities (i.e. agencies, funds and programmes) in addition to the UN proper. Each of these entities had its own governing body, making it difficult for the UN “system” to act coherently, under a central budget authority.

More earmarked funding as opposed to core funding not targeted to specific activities made long-term planning difficult. Other downsides of earmarking included: high transaction costs to negotiate bilateral funding and abide by different donors’ reporting requirements; potential “bias” in terms of the work the United Nations might end up doing to satisfy major donor demands, potentially at the expense of its own core mandate; increased competition for limited donor funds between agencies; a diversion of core resources to support voluntary (non-core) projects; and a “bilateralization” of UN funding in what could be called a “pay to play” system and in contradiction with the very nature of the United Nations as a multilateral organization.

It was noted that the total annual budget of the UN system, including development operations, peacekeeping, humanitarian and normative work amounted to a mere US\$ 48 billion, or about half the operating budget of the City of New York, or US\$ 6 per person (globally). Any discussion about the UN budget should consider first and foremost whether this amount is adequate to support such a large worldwide organization whose workload has grown considerably bigger over the years in the face of mounting global challenges. This is best exemplified by the humanitarian work of the UN (31% of its budget), which has grown three-fold in just one decade.



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From the perspective of “value for money”, there is no question that the UN is delivering a lot to the world. Programme support fees that the UN charges donors to execute their chosen projects is well below those charged by other major international agencies and even NGOs (8-10% vs. 15-18% on average). Under pressure from Member States, and in order to meet difficult budget circumstances, the United Nations has taken and continues to take a number of measures to make itself more efficient and cost-effective. Yet this can only go so far: without additional resources, the United Nations cannot be asked to meet ever increasing demands.

In the end, Member States were caught in a contradiction: at the same time as they were asking the United Nations to “self-correct”, streamlining operations, innovating, and improving administrative procedures to cut costs, they insist on earmarked funding despite its well-known downsides. Similarly, while Member States insisted on austerity and expected the UN to do its own fundraising, they were generally opposed to innovative funding practices such as international taxes, which could provide the United Nations with an independent revenue stream.

Parliaments can play a major role in this issue as they have the final say on all allocations to the UN through the budget process. Yet very few MPs truly understand how the UN is funded as this information tends to be broken down in different sections of the budget document. MPs generally lack awareness of the *kind* of funding that goes to the UN and not just of the total amount that each government contributes. Conversely, MPs in countries that are at the receiving end of UN operations know even less about those operations and their costs.

At the end of the debate, the President invited participants to look more carefully at the budget document to see how funding for the various agencies and programmes is presented. MPs should consider asking their governments to summarize all allocations to the UN into a single annex to the budget document. This annex would need to clearly identify the kind of contribution to the UN – i.e. assessed, voluntary, earmarked – and not just the amounts.

The second session was devoted to *The UN response to allegations of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers*. The following experts participated in the debate: Mr. B. Klappe, Senior Military Legal Expert, Office of the Special Coordinator on improving UN response to sexual exploitation and abuse, United Nations; Ms. S. Whitman, Executive Director, Roméo Dallaire Child Soldier Initiative, Canada (via Skype); Ms. A. Rashed Albasti, MP, United Arab Emirates; Mr. E. Mokolo Wa Mpombo, First Vice-President of the Senate, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The session began with a presentation by Mr. Klappe outlining the main steps the United Nations had taken to prevent its peacekeepers from committing sexual abuse and exploiting children and adults. A number of such violations had occurred over the years partly as a result of a reconfiguration of peacekeeping, which required more interaction between peacekeepers and the civilian population in conflict zones. Despite a long-standing zero tolerance policy on the matter, in 2014 the need for a comprehensive policy review became urgent as a result of a whistle-blower exposing the failure of the UN to deal with sexual abuse cases involving peacekeepers in the Central African Republic.

Following the recommendations of an independent panel of experts, and under the leadership of a Special Coordinator, the UN response included such steps as: creating an interdepartmental steering group to oversee peacekeeping operations; putting in place a clear, system-wide protocol for victims assistance (on the premise that victim protection must come first); establishing clear accountability lines to identify who is responsible for what action throughout the chain of command; developing a common glossary to clarify the various meanings of sexual abuse and exploitation; and establishing a trust fund to support victims.

Conflict is in itself a form of abuse of the civilian population, and particularly of children. Sexual abuse and exploitation are unfortunately all too common around the world and in both public and private sectors. Notwithstanding these considerations, the United Nations must make every possible effort to protect innocent civilians from abuse by the hands of their protectors, i.e. peacekeepers, and to ensure that people can trust the United Nations as a force for good in all circumstances. No abuse is ever justified and the argument that poverty, cultural differences, and other vulnerabilities of people in conflict countries contribute to the problem should be roundly rejected as an attempt “to blame the victim” instead of the perpetrators.

Key steps to prevent new cases of abuse include: ensuring soldiers are properly trained on human rights, and on appropriate conduct in the field, not just before deployment but from the beginning and throughout their careers; shortening the length of time troops are deployed; and making more systematic use of the UN Secretary-General's authority to dismiss an entire contingent in case of any violation. An overlooked approach but possibly a game changer when it comes to prevention of sexual abuse and exploitation may be the inclusion of more women soldiers in peacekeeping missions. Women are far less likely to commit sexual violations than men. As investigators, women are also better suited to obtain evidence from children and other women.

Next to prevention, ensuring a proper handling of each allegation is key to the whole process. Collecting evidence and testimonials as soon as possible and on-site is critical to ensure a fair hearing or a possible trial. Ideally, troop-contributing countries should provide the United Nations with access to a DNA sample from each soldier (DNA data bank), should allegations arise regarding unlawful physical contact, or to settle paternity cases.

Regarding the legal jurisdiction that should apply to each case, the UN default option can only be the jurisdiction of the soldier's nationality. Leaving it to the host country's court system to try such cases is not advisable given that most countries in conflict lack the capacities to uphold the rule of law. Countries where peacekeepers are present should collect evidence of abuse in response to an allegation and in concert with the UN authorities in the field.

Parliamentarians can help facilitate legislation to make sure that the highest standards of accountability as well as due process under the law are followed. In troop-contributing countries, parliaments can make DNA collection from soldiers mandatory before deployment. They can also require that all deployments and their applicable conditions are subject to parliamentary approval. In troop-receiving countries, parliaments can ensure laws allow UN investigators the right to interview witnesses as needed. Parliaments and civil society organizations can do more to educate people to reduce the risk of sexual abuse and exploitation. They can review the training programmes provided to their troops to ensure adequate respect for human and gender rights, and child protection.

Most importantly, parliaments everywhere must make sure that sexual abuse and exploitation are properly defined and classified as crimes under the law.