

UNITED NATIONS APPEALS TRIBUNAL TRIBUNAL D'APPEL DES NATIONS UNIES

Judgment No. 2015-UNAT-529

Riano (Appellant)

v.

Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (Respondent)

JUDGMENT

Before: Judge Deborah Thomas-Felix, Presiding

Judge Sophia Adinyira Judge Luis María Simón

Case No: 2014-606

Date: 26 February 2015

Registrar: Weicheng Lin

Counsel for Mr. Riano: Self-represented

Counsel for Commissioner-General: Lance Bartholomeusz

JUDGE DEBORAH THOMAS-FELIX, PRESIDING.

1. The United Nations Appeals Tribunal has before it an appeal filed by Mr. Camilo Riano against Judgment Nos. UNRWA/DT/2013/035 and UNRWA/DT/2014/004, rendered by the Dispute Tribunal of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA DT or UNRWA Dispute Tribunal and UNRWA or Agency, respectively) on 1 October 2013 and 13 March 2014, respectively, in the case of Riano v. Commissioner-General of UNRWA. Mr. Riano appealed on 13 May 2014 and the Commissioner-General of UNRWA answered on 15 July 2014.

Facts and Procedure

The UNRWA DT made the following findings of fact:¹

... By Letter of Appointment dated 18 July 2011 [Mr. Riano] was offered a one-year Fixed Term Appointment as Project Manager, Enterprise Resources Planning ("ERP"), at the P-5, Step 5 level at UNRWA Headquarters, Amman. The appointment had taken effect on 10 July 2011.
...

... It is clear to the [UNRWA DT] from witness testimony and documents that there was disagreement, uncertainty and tension about [Mr. Riano]'s role and job description from a very early stage in the employment relationship. Nevertheless, [Mr. Riano] signed both the Letter of Appointment and the International Post Description for the post of "Project Manager — Enterprise Resource Planning" with signatures dated 21 July 2011. [...]

... By e-mail to [Mr. Riano] dated 2 August 2011, [Ms. Laura Londén, the Acting Director, Enterprise Resource Planning ("AD/ERP"), his direct supervisor] offered to discuss [Mr. Riano]'s role in the ERP team with him if he did not have total clarity in this regard following their meeting [of 21 July 2011 during which Mr. Riano's role as Project Manager was discussed]. [...]

... By e-mail dated 3 August 2011, [Mr. Riano] responded to Ms. Londén, expressing a number of concerns about his job description and relationship with her.

¹ Judgment No. UNRWA/DT/2013/035, paras. 7-66.

...

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... On 13 October 2011 a disagreement arose via exchange of e-mails between [Mr. Riano] and Ms. Londén over a presentation that [Mr. Riano] was to give to the Advisory Commission Subcommittee. Ms. Londén requested that [Mr. Riano] give a 'dry-run' rehearsal of the presentation. [Mr. Riano] indicated that he felt uncomfortable doing so. [...] The disagreement appears to have severely tested Ms. Londén's patience. She felt that she had grounds to question the continued viability of the employment relationship.

By e-mail to Ms. Ellis, the Deputy Commissioner-General, who was Mr. Rianol's Second Reporting Officer and **Project** Sponsor, Ms. Cornelia Moussa, the Director of Human Resources. dated 13 October, forwarding her correspondence with [Mr. Riano], Ms Londén stated [inter alia]:

I am really truly sorry to say that as this week has demonstrated, from my perspective, that this simply is not going to work. It is possible that it might work better with someone else (than me), but the frustration and feedback from the team would indicate not. [...]

- ... [...] According to the Respondent's Reply, by this stage [Mr. Riano] had also failed to satisfactorily complete a number of tasks assigned to him by Ms. Londén.
- ... On 20 October 2011, the Agency issued Vacancy Announcement No. 11-HQ-AM-47 for the post of Director, Enterprise Resources Planning, D-1. [Mr. Riano] applied for the vacancy.
- ... By e-mail dated 16 November 2011, Ms. Moussa informed [Mr. Riano] that his candidature for the position of ERP Director had not been successful because the position required a "different profile".

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- ... By e-mail dated 27 November 2011, an Assistant Personnel Officer sent [Mr. Riano] a Performance Evaluation Report ("PER") form for the period 10 July 2011 to 30 April 2012, requesting that he complete the relevant sections before forwarding it to his supervisor for completion.
- ... On 14 December 2011, Ms. Londén forwarded the Assistant Personnel Officer's e-mail of 27 November 2011 to [Mr. Riano] stating [inter alia]:
 - ... we will need to schedule the mid-term performance review session early in January when you are back from leave. DHR will take part in this discussion.

...

... [Mr. Riano] testified that some time in January 2012, his fiancée, who at that time also worked at the Agency, was notified that she had been selected for a post

in New York. As a matter of courtesy, he notified Ms. Londén that he was considering moving to New York to join his fiancée. [...]

- ... In early February another disagreement broke out in the ERP Project when a staff member sent a project document to an external partner. [Mr. Riano] retracted the document, stating that it had been sent without his authorization. [...]
- ... Other staff members working on the ERP Project were unhappy with [Mr. Riano]'s handling of the situation as evidenced by e-mails on the record that were sent to both [Mr. Riano] and Ms. Londén.
- ... By e-mail dated 4 February 2012, Ms. Londén [...] concluded that [Mr. Riano]'s e-mail to the external partner retracting the document had been a "wholly inappropriate" way of dealing with the situation. This e-mail was sent to [Mr. Riano] and members of the ERP team without Ms. Londén first seeking an explanation from [Mr. Riano].

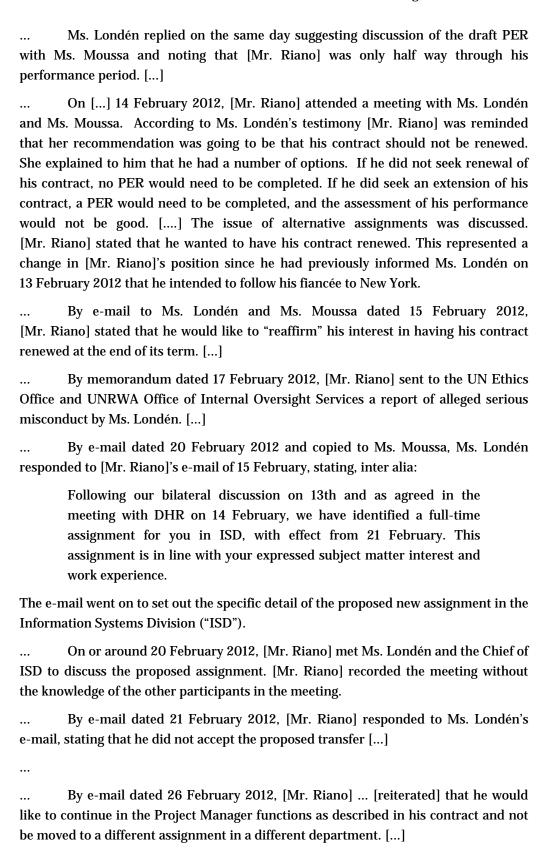
...

- ... At a meeting on 13 February 2012, between [Mr. Riano] and Ms. Londén [Mr. Riano] indicated his intention to follow his fiancée to New York. Ms. Londén then informed [Mr. Riano] that she did not intend to recommend the renewal of his fixed-term appointment upon its expiration. [...]
- ... By e-mail to Ms. Moussa dated 13 February 2012, Ms. Londén summarised the meeting with [Mr. Riano] as follows:

To summarize, in a meeting today, Camilo indicated – and I accepted – that he would in tomorrow's meeting advise us both formally of his intention not to extend his contract beyond 10 July due to Louise's return to UNICEF.

Between now and end of contract I will assign him tasks outside the ERP PMO structure which do not entail close interaction or interdependencies with the team [...]

- ... [Mr. Riano] was concerned [...] that there may not be a performance appraisal to cover his work over the year with the Agency. [...] Accordingly by e-mail to Ms. Londén dated 14 February 2012 [Mr. Riano] sent a draft PER for "review and signature."
- ... [Mr. Riano] filled out both the self-appraisal sections of the PER and the sections that the instructions indicate are for the First Reporting Officer to complete [...] [Mr. Riano] rated himself as exceeding performance expectations in relation to six indicators and as meeting performance expectations in relation to five indicators. He also filled out Section VIII Overall Performance Rating which according to the instructions is to be completed by the Second Reporting Officer. [Mr. Riano] indicated an overall performance rating of "exceeds performance expectations".



... By e-mail dated 26 February 2012, Ms. Londén responded [inter alia]:

...[S]hould you wish to discuss further this, or any other issues or statements in your email, I am available to meet at any time today, or in the course of the week. In light of past experience, I will invite a 3rd party to be present in any such meeting.

... [Mr. Riano] failed to take up Ms Londen's invitation of a meeting to discuss his concerns but sent her a written response by e-mail dated 1 March 2012. He reiterated a number of concerns including the historical lack of clarity on his roles and responsibilities and Ms. Londén's alleged lack of action in that regard; Ms. Londén's continued reference to team discord and alleged mismanagement of such discord if it did exist; unjustified restrictions on communications; and mixed signals about the PER [...]

... E-mails between Ms. Londén, Ms. Ellis and Ms. Moussa in early March indicate that a decision was made at that point to recommend the termination of [Mr. Riano]'s employment. It was considered urgent to resolve the issue as soon as possible because of the perceived negative effect of [Mr. Riano] on the ERP team and "leave" that Ms. Londén had scheduled between 7 and 17 March. By e-mail dated 1 March to Ms. Ellis and Ms. Moussa, Ms. Londén stated:

...the intent is to finalise the PER urgently, share it with Camilo Sun-Mon, discuss it with him in the presence of DHR (Mon), and then take the matter to the ACHR next week with a recommendation to terminate with 30 days notice.

Cornelia, on second thought, it may be best not to share the PER with him ahead of our meeting with him; simply as I have no way of gauging his reaction.

...

... By e-mail dated 6 March 2012 (8:01 AM), Ms. Londén informed [Mr. Riano] that a meeting would be scheduled for that day to discuss his draft PER and any other issues he wished to raise. [...]

... By e-mail response the same day (9:00 AM), [Mr. Riano] stated:

... I would like to have a conversation with the Project Sponsor first. [...]

... By e-mail to [Mr. Riano] at 9:41 AM, Ms. Moussa stated that the draft PER that he had been invited to discuss reflected the assessment of both his First and Second Reporting Officers. She also stated [inter alia]:

This meeting must take place today [...] because the First Reporting Officer will be away on mission travel from tomorrow. The Second

Reporting Officer is not available for the meeting today as she is currently on mission in the area of operations.

... By e-mail to Ms. Moussa at 11:11 AM [Mr. Riano] responded stating:

If the draft PER reflects the assessment of the DCG, then there is a strong business reason to wait until she is available to participate in the meeting.

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... By e-mail to [Mr. Riano] at 5:23 PM Ms. Londén responded to his e-mail sent at 11:11 AM noting with regret that he had "declined to meet with DHR and myself to discuss your draft PER, today, 6 March, at 14hrs, as set out in the email exchanges below" (the email exchanges are set out above). Ms. Londén attached the draft PER for his review and comments and noted that it reflected the assessment of both the First and [Second] Reporting Officers. She asked [Mr. Riano] to provide any comments to Ms. Moussa, Ms. Ellis and herself by close of business 9 March.

... In the draft PER [Mr. Riano]'s performance was rated as not meeting expectations in relation to nine performance indicators and meeting expectations in relation to one indicator – gender. Another indicator – problem solving skills – was rated as not applicable with a corresponding comment stating that Ms. Londén had been "unable to assess [the indicator] substantively". [...]

... On 7 March 2012, [Mr. Riano] had a meeting at his request with Mr. Patrick Cronin, the Chief, Personnel Services Division ("CPSD") to discuss the PER process. [Mr. Riano] recorded the meeting without the knowledge of Mr. Cronin. [Mr. Riano] alleges that Mr. Cronin tried to bully and threaten him into accepting a compromise resolution.

... By Interoffice Memorandum dated 13 March [2012] and addressed to the DCG in her capacity as Chair of the Advisory Committee on Human Resources ("ACHR"), Ms. Moussa referred the matter of [Mr. Riano]'s contract to the ACHR "for review and recommendation to the Commissioner-General". The memorandum stated:

According to the Director of Administrative Support who is currently the Acting ERP Director, Mr. Riano has not demonstrated the aptitude required for the post. His presence in the ERP team has become a source of disruption and distraction among team members

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... A meeting of the ACHR was convened on 14 March 2012. The issue of [Mr. Riano]'s performance and contract was included on the agenda. According to the minutes of the meeting, Ms. Ellis introduced the item and then invited Ms. Moussa to provide further information. Ms. Moussa then provided a summary of the situation [...]. The minutes record a few brief comments from other members of the ACHR in

support of termination with 30 days notice, which the ACHR recommended to the Commissioner-General.

- ... On 18 March 2012, Ms. Ellis, as the ACHR Chair, signed off on the recommendation and on 20 March 2012 Mr. Grandi, the Commissioner-General, approved the decision.
- ... On 22 March 2012, [Mr. Riano] met Ms. Moussa and Mr. Nathan Baca, a Human Resources Officer. Ms. Moussa informed [Mr. Riano] that the ACHR had recommended, and the Commissioner-General had decided, that his contract should come to an end. [Mr. Riano] recorded the meeting without the knowledge of Ms. Moussa or Mr. Baca. At the meeting, [Mr. Riano] was given a letter dated that day in which Ms. Moussa informed him in writing that his fixed-term appointment would be terminated in the interest of the Agency. [...]

...

- ... By Interoffice Memorandum dated 16 April 2012, Ms. Christine Kisenga, the Officer-in-Charge of the Personnel Services Division, attached a PER for [Mr. Riano]'s "review and signature" on Part X as an acknowledgement of the completion of the report. She asked that he return the signed PER to her before the last day of his appointment on 22 April 2012.
- ... [...] The case file contains no record of [Mr. Riano] having signed the PER sent to him by Ms. Kisenga.
- ... By e-mail to the Deputy Commissioner-General dated 18 April 2012, [Mr. Riano] sought review of the decision to terminate his appointment. [...]
- ... By e-mail to the Commissioner-General dated 2 May 2012 [Mr. Riano] sought a suspension of the implementation of the 22 March 2012 decision to terminate his appointment until a decision review had been completed and the outcome notified to [Mr. Riano].
- ... By e-mail to [Mr. Riano] dated 5 June 2012, the Commissioner-General rejected [Mr. Riano]'s request for suspension of action, noting that the request was submitted on 2 May 2012, "at which time your separation from UNRWA had already been fully effected." The Commissioner-General also stated that the matter had been thoroughly reviewed by management and that the decision was based upon [Mr. Riano]'s "documented underperformance during the probationary period". Accordingly, he had not found a sufficient basis to suspend the decision.
- ... By letter to [Mr. Riano] dated 6 June 2012, Ms. Ellis responded to [Mr. Riano]'s request for decision review, affirming the decision to terminate his appointment [...]

...

- ... By memorandum dated 11 June 2012, [Mr. Riano] submitted a second complaint to the United Nations Ethics Office alleging continued harassment, abuse of power and retaliation by Ms. Londén, Ms. Moussa and Mr. Cronin following his initial complaint, and continuing after his contract was terminated on 22 March 2012.
- ... The Application was filed on 16 August 2012 and transmitted to the Respondent on 7 October 2012.
- 3. On 1 October 2013, the UNRWA DT rendered Judgment No. UNRWA/DT/2013/035. As a preliminary matter, the UNRWA DT determined that matters not included by Mr. Riano in his request for decision review dated 18 April 2012 were not receivable. These included the claim of harassment during the termination process insofar as it related to matters such as the separation procedures that were followed after 22 March 2012, the alleged harassment of Mr. Riano's wife and any separation entitlements that allegedly remained outstanding.
- 4. The UNRWA DT also determined not to admit into evidence the three recordings of meetings that Mr. Riano had made without the knowledge of the other participants, as they were deemed to be not relevant, sufficiently probative nor necessary for a fair and just disposal of the proceedings.
- 5. Regarding the merits of the case, the UNRWA DT noted that when a staff member appeals a decision based on his or her alleged professional shortcomings, the Tribunal will not assess the competence of the individual, but rather examine the facts to see if the decision taken accorded with due process and procedural propriety or was improperly motivated.
- 6. The UNRWA DT determined that Ms. Londén failed to communicate clearly and unequivocally to Mr. Riano that his overall performance was below expectations and needed to be improved. The UNRWA DT further found that the performance appraisal procedures adopted in Mr. Riano's case were improper in that there was no discussion with Mr. Riano about his performance before finalizing the PER. The UNRWA DT also found that the ACHR meeting supporting the recommendation of Mr. Riano's termination was flawed in that: (i) Ms. Moussa gave a one-sided presentation which did not include the written comments of Mr. Riano; and (ii) Ms. Ellis participated as Chair in the discussion of this matter even though she was Mr. Riano's Second Reporting Officer who had approved the contents of his PER.

- 7. Noting that Mr. Riano's allegations of harassment, extortion or abuse of power against Ms. Londén, Ms. Moussa and/or Mr. Cronin were based primarily on the recordings that the UNRWA DT had determined to be inadmissible, the UNRWA DT dismissed these allegations as unsubstantiated.
- 8. Regarding Mr. Riano's claim that the termination of his employment was an act of retaliation by Ms. Londén, the UNRWA DT found that there was insufficient evidence to establish a causal link between Mr. Riano's report of 17 February 2012 sent to the Ethics Office and UNRWA Internal Oversight Services and the contested decisions.
- 9. The UNRWA DT rescinded the decision to terminate Mr. Riano's fixed-term contract before the date of expiry and ordered the Agency to pay the salary and other emoluments and benefits to which Mr. Riano would have been entitled had his contract continued until its expiration date.
- 10. On 13 March 2014, the UNRWA DT rendered a separate judgment on remedies, Judgment No. UNRWA/DT/2014/004. The UNRWA DT dismissed Mr. Riano's claim for reimbursement of round trip travel costs from Colombia to Amman as a dependent of his wife after his separation from the Agency as it considered it to be unrelated to the termination decision under review.
- 11. Noting that Mr. Riano was employed on a fixed-term contract with no right or expectation of renewal, the UNRWA DT dismissed his claim for an award of damages in the amount of USD 500,758.84 which the UNRWA DT found to be purely speculative in nature and unsupported by any evidence of substance showing a causal connection with his termination.
- 12. The UNRWA DT also made findings as to the amount of remuneration, repatriation grant and annual leave compensation to which Mr. Riano was entitled, from which the termination indemnity that he had previously received was deducted.
- 13. The UNRWA DT found that Mr. Riano suffered a moderate degree of anxiety and stress as a result of the contested decision and awarded USD 8,000 for moral damages.
- 14. Mr. Riano appealed the two Judgments to this Tribunal on 13 May 2014, and the Commissioner-General answered on 15 July 2014.

15. By Order No. 201, this Tribunal allowed the Commissioner-General to amend his answer brief by striking out Part III denominated "Preliminary Issue".

Submissions

Mr. Riano's Appeal

- 16. Mr. Riano asserts that the UNRWA DT erred in fact by assuming that his contract had no expectation of renewal. Mr. Riano requests reinstatement at UNRWA or another United Nations Agency.
- 17. Mr. Riano asserts that the UNRWA DT erred in now allowing a re-examination of his claim for loss of income at the hearing on remedies. He requests his original claim amount of USD 500,758.84.
- 18. Mr. Riano contests the amount of repatriation grant that he has received. He claims to have received a partial amount of USD 4,991.77 when the amount should be the equivalent of one-month net salary, i.e., USD 7,210.33.
- 19. Mr. Riano asserts that the UNRWA DT erred in not admitting his three recordings as evidence. Mr. Riano claims that the UNRWA DT used the contents of the recordings as evidence to support part of its Judgment but denied him the opportunity to present the evidence and demonstrate its probative value. Mr. Riano requests his original claim amount of USD 50,000 for moral damages and, in addition, referral of staff members involved in his case to the "Secretary-General" for accountability measures.

The Commissioner-General's Answer

- 20. The UNRWA DT did not err in law on the question of expectation of renewal of contract, and correctly concluded that it would not be appropriate to order reinstatement.
- 21. Having awarded Mr. Riano the salary and emoluments that he would have been entitled had his contract continued until expiration, the UNRWA DT correctly disregarded Mr. Riano's unsubstantiated methodology of calculating loss of income at the hearing on remedies.

- 22. Regarding the repatriation grant, the Agency paid the amount that it maintained was due to Mr. Riano. As the UNRWA DT dismissed this claim for failure of Mr. Riano to support the claimed amount, there is no basis to interfere with this determination.
- 23. The UNRWA DT properly exercised its discretion to determine the admissibility of the secret recordings under Article 13 of its Rules of Procedure. Mr. Riano has not demonstrated that the recordings, if admitted, would have led to different findings of fact and changed the outcome of the case.
- 24. The UNRWA DT extensively reviewed the issue of moral damages and determined that Mr. Riano "suffered a moderate degree of anxiety and stress". Mr. Riano has not demonstrated that there has been an error in the UNRWA DT's approach to the issue of moral damages.
- 25. Aside from the fact that the UNRWA DT has the discretion to make referrals to the Commissioner-General, and not the Secretary-General, for accountability purposes, Mr. Riano failed to demonstrate that the UNRWA DT improperly exercised its discretion on this matter.

Considerations

- 26. As a preliminary matter, Mr. Riano made a request to this Tribunal for an oral hearing. Oral hearings are governed by Article 8(3) of the Appeals Tribunal Statute and Article 18(1) of the Appeals Tribunal Rules of Procedure (Rules). The factual and legal issues arising from this appeal have already been clearly defined by the parties and there is no need for further clarification. We do not find that an oral hearing would "assist in the expeditious and fair disposal of the case", as required by Article 18(1) of the Rules. The request for an oral hearing is hereby denied.
- 27. The main issue is whether a staff member has legitimate expectations and rights related to the renewal of a fixed-term contract. International Staff Rule 104.3 provides that "[t]he fixed-term appointment does not carry any expectation of renewal or of conversion to any other type of appointment".

- 28. A fixed-term contract ends with the effluxion of time and in the usual course of things a person employed under such a contract does not have a right or legitimate expectations of its renewal. Mr. Riano was employed on a one-year fixed-term contract and there is no evidence that an express promise was made to him by anyone in authority to extend the life of the said contract. Indeed, his fixed-term contract was terminated before the date of expiry.
- 29. Therefore, there is no basis to support Mr. Riano's claim of legitimate expectations and/or rights for the renewal of his contract. As a consequence, any pecuniary claim which Mr. Riano has that is related to what he perceives as his legitimate expectation of the renewal of his contract fails.
- 30. Mr. Riano has failed to demonstrate that the UNRWA DT erred with respect to the amount awarded for moral damages. This Tribunal finds that the UNRWA DT evaluated all the evidence, both oral and documentary, before it and made a reasoned assessment as to the amount of anxiety and stress suffered by Mr. Riano.² This Tribunal will not lightly interfere with the determination of the UNRWA DT in this regard.
- 31. With respect to the amount of his repatriation grant, Mr. Riano has not provided any evidence to show that the UNRWA DT made an error in dismissing his claim for further payment. Accordingly, Mr. Riano's contention in this regard is rejected.
- 32. Mr. Riano has also failed to establish that the UNRWA DT erred in not admitting the three recordings as evidence. As this Tribunal has stated previously, the "Judge hearing the case has an appreciation of all the issues for determination and the evidence before [it]. In order to establish that the Judge erred, it is necessary to establish that the evidence, if admitted, would have led to different findings of fact and changed the outcome of the case."³

Judgment

33. This appeal is dismissed. This Tribunal upholds the Judgment of the UNRWA DT.

² Judgment on Remedies, paras. 38-44.

³ Abbassi v. Secretary-General of the United Nations, Judgment No. 2011-UNAT-110, para. 20.

		Judgment No. 2015-UNAT-5
riginal and Authoritative Versi	on: English	
ated this 26 th day of February 2	2015 in New York, United Stat	es.
(Signed)	(Signed)	(Signed)
Judge Thomas-Felix, Presiding	Judge Adinyira	Judge Simón

(Signed)

Weicheng Lin, Registrar