



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

23 March, 2016

Excellency,

Further to my letter dated 23 February, 2016 and in accordance with resolution 69/321 on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly, I wish to inform that I have transmitted the enclosed summary report from the discussions on the informal meeting to consider ways and means of further enhancing the cooperation between Permanent Missions and the UN Secretariat held on 15 March, 2016 to the Secretary-General.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mogens Lykketoft', written in a cursive style.

Mogens Lykketoft

To all Permanent Representatives
And Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

SUMMARY

INFORMAL MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY TO CONSIDER WAYS AND MEANS OF FURTHER ENHANCING COOPERATION BETWEEN PERMANENT MISSIONS AND THE UN SECRETARIAT

1. On Tuesday, 15 March 2016, the President of the General Assembly convened an informal meeting to consider ways and means **to further enhance cooperation between Permanent Missions and the Secretariat**, in accordance with paragraph 10 of resolution 69/321 on the revitalization of the work of the General Assembly. The Assembly in the same resolution reaffirmed that the presence of Permanent Missions serves to assist the realization of the purposes and principles of the United Nations, and further recognized the importance of their role in contributing to the effectiveness and efficiency of the General Assembly, as well as the role of the Secretariat in accommodating the work of Permanent Missions. The present overview has been prepared in accordance with resolution 69/321, which requests the President of the General Assembly to **transmit a summary** of this meeting to the Secretary-General.

2. In his opening remarks, the President welcomed the opportunity for an **open and frank exchange of views** on ways to improve the quality of the working environment at UN Headquarters. The President was joined on the podium by Ms. Catherine Pollard, Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management (DGACM), Ms. Cristina Gallach, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information (DPI), Mr. Peter Thomas Drennan, Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security (DSS), and Mr. Stephen Cutts, Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services in the Department of Management (DM). A total of **12 delegations** intervened, including on behalf of a large group of countries. This was followed by comments from the senior Secretariat representatives.

3. Many delegations thanked the PGA for **organizing this informal meeting**, and for his commitment to strengthening the work of the General Assembly as a whole. Delegations throughout their interventions agreed that a revitalized General Assembly was in fact vital for strengthening the wider UN system, improving international governance, and enhancing multilateralism. One delegation suggested that the effective **implementation of the 2030 Agenda** hinged on an effective UN Secretariat. Speakers also noted with respect and admiration the “tremendous” work of the UN staff, recognising their motivation and professionalism. Delegations generally emphasised that **transparency, accountability and good faith cooperation** should form the basis of work at the United Nations, including that of the Secretariat. The principle of **good governance**, in sum, was identified as applicable to the UN as a whole.

4. At the same time, it was also noted that, while “people do good”, the system itself needed “a little tweaking”, notably through improved relations between Permanent Missions and the UN Secretariat, in particular to alleviate the work for smaller missions, a concern echoed by other speakers as well. One area of common concern was the **hosting of events and meetings** at UNHQ. Delegations

expressed considerable frustration about **high service costs**, **overlapping billing systems**, and **coordination challenges** in preparing side events on the UN premises. While welcoming the **list of contact points** for organizing side events now available in the UN Journal, it was pointed out that a list of ten contact points for organizing such event was “rather cumbersome”. The same delegations demonstrated the difficulty of reaching the right Secretariat staff, both in the sense of **identifying the responsible person** – which was a recurring complaint – as well as literally, by needing to dial complex digit combinations when calling from outside. Related to the perceived difficulty of organizing side events, some delegations requested further clarification on the costs associated with meeting services provided to Member States, which several speakers felt were **considerably exceeding those off the UN campus**.

5. On the topic of outreach to Permanent Missions, the need for **timely and consistent sharing of information** was emphasised. This, again, was particularly important for smaller delegations which had limited personnel capacity. As an example, delegates highlighted the need to be **consulted far in advance** on preparations for the high-level week, rather than presented with finalised information, including as regarded security arrangements. On the issue of **documentation**, the need was highlighted for timely preparation and submission by the Secretariat of reports and other information. One delegation reiterated its concern about the efficient use of paper, noting that **printed documents still needed to be available** to delegates in meetings, and in all official UN languages, especially for visiting high-level delegations from capitals who were dependent on information. This, it was stressed, was irrespective of the paper smart concept. Defending strongly the concept of **multilingualism**, one delegation wondered why Spanish sometimes was one of the last languages that documents were issued in.

6. Clear channels for **communicating and engaging** with the Secretariat in fact were a recurring theme; bridging the communication gap was identified as the “single strongest confidence-building measure” to ensure an open, respectful and fair working environment at the United Nations. In this respect it was proposed that the UN Yellow and White Pages could be updated digitally on a more regular basis (which currently took place only once a year, despite many staff frequently moving), following the example of the Blue Book. Additionally, the information available in the **Yellow and White Pages** could be made “more client-friendly”, and easier to understand. On a separate note, one delegation emphasised the need for the Secretary-General and senior Secretariat officials to always make place in their calendars and to respond to meetings requests from Heads of States and other dignitaries.

7. A number of delegations raised the issue of **access to UN premises**, particularly, but not exclusively, for high-level participants during the high-level week. Concerns were expressed over changes to “open and closed doors”, **multiple checkpoints inside UN premises**, and extensive screening for Mission staff during the high-level week, arguing that such procedures should be “discussed with the Missions, not be imposed on them”. Security staff should also be trained in profiling and recognizing Heads of State and Government as well as Permanent Representatives. Several delegations questioned the **use of the Delegates Lounge** by non-delegates, including for Friday evening parties with attendance from outside

guests. The UN building itself should reflect the 2030 Agenda, i.e. be environmentally friendly and technologically up-to-date, including with access for disabled people. Also on a practical note, it was noted that sometimes seats were not available for Member States in meetings, already being occupied by non-Member States.

8. Another common theme was the **role of the UN Secretariat in facilitating the work of the Assembly**, while avoiding unauthorized actions or decisions. It was stated that the Secretariat of the United Nations, including the Secretary-General, were bound to operate within the policy framework established by the General Assembly. The Secretariat was urged to “avoid any situation that may face Member States with a *fait-accompli*”, citing as “one noteworthy example” the **final outcomes of major conferences** with high-level participation of Member States, arguing that “proper coordination with Member States can ensure that they reflect the true desire and determination of the international community.” The importance of the Secretariat **consulting** with Member States prior to implementing any initiatives and activities within the organization was also stressed, with the Human Rights Upfront initiative offered as an example where greater consultation with, as well as the authorization of, Member States was needed. It was indeed noted that it was the joint responsibility of Member States to give the Secretariat **the needed budget and financial resources** to implement the mandates and services requested by the Membership.

9. To address the aforementioned concerns, delegations made a number of concrete suggestions **on the way forward**, including: (i) a **permanent mechanism** of communication between Permanent Missions and the Secretariat on matters pertaining to the “daily work” of delegates; (ii) certain “structural arrangements”, such as “a **mixed committee**”, comprised of representatives of Member States and certain departments of the Secretariat; (iii) inclusion of a new **agenda item** on this issue for the next session; (iv) a formal opportunity for Member States to participate in the drafting of UN Rules, perhaps by circulating drafts as requests for proposals under silence procedure; (v) the creation of **an IT app for mobile devices**, bringing together all the necessary information; (vi) the establishment of a **single focal point or directory** in the Secretariat which could be contacted and who would direct queries to the right person; and (vii) the Assembly could revisit some of the findings of a 1997 retreat organized by the Stanley Foundation on this same topic, which may prove useful in today’s context, even though it was acknowledged that a lot of progress had been made since then.

10. Following interventions from Member States, the senior representatives of the Secretariat present at the meeting responded to the various questions and comments raised. The **Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly and Conference Management** thanked delegations for the opportunity to listen to their concerns to which she had listened very carefully. The Secretariat now needed to digest the points raised and reflect on them. The frustration among the membership over difficulties faced, such as for instance in the organization of side events, had been clearly heard. While it was true that the Secretariat was organized in different Departments, and hence in a decentralized fashion, it was understood that ten focal points was over the top. The Under-Secretary-General similarly agreed that the suggestion for a **central focal point who could direct queries within the**

Secretariat was a sensible one and noted that the time had come to look into ways of how to **bring coherence to the existing structure**. Concerning the planning for the high-level week every September, the Under-Secretary-General acknowledged the need expressed by Member States for more timely information-sharing and, while pointing to the current practice of issuing INF notes and convening briefing sessions open to all delegations, the call for earlier engagement by the Secretariat was heard and would be taken aboard. Noting the **forthcoming high-level meetings** scheduled at the end of April 2016, she informed that another briefing session was under preparation and would take place in the near future. Recalling the **budgetary constraints** faced by the Secretariat as a whole, DGACM in particular continued to face challenges in relation with the timely issuance of official UN documents. Nonetheless, the Department would do its very best with the resources it had at its disposal. In conclusion, the Under-Secretary-General underscored the importance for DGACM, as a client provider, of receiving **feedback from the Member States**, and informed that the Department was currently looking into ways to better collect Member States' level of satisfaction with the services provided, and also to do so in a more systematic manner.

11. The **Assistant Secretary-General for Central Support Services** in the Department of Management emphasized that the Secretariat viewed Member States as its clients and that DM had taken away a number of key messages from this debate. These included **the need to clarify rules and regulations** and to make them available in a more comprehensive and easily accessible manner; to erase any unnecessary obstacles in Member States' daily work at UNHQ; **to work better together internally** to present a single face vis-a-vis the membership, instead of a plurality of focal points; and to ensure clearer and **better communication with delegations**. At the same time, the Assistant Secretary-General noted that some of the complexities in the Secretariat's provision of services resulted from intergovernmental mandates, such as General Assembly resolutions, sometimes originating back from the 1950s. This however also needed to be better communicated to the membership. As responsible for the provision of catering services and other facilities, the Assistant Secretary-General recognized the frustration with the **costs charged to Permanent Missions**, which was a point requiring further reflection, even as he observed that there were additional factors that needed to be borne in mind when looking at this issue.

12. Responding to queries raised relating to public information, the **Under-Secretary-General for Public Information**, welcomed the exchange between the Secretariat and Member States on improving the relationship, which would certainly help to further improve what is already a service-oriented Department, namely focussing in particular on issues related to DPI. Openness and transparency were principles critical to the Department's work. Concerning the **question of guided tours**, for example, she pointed out that during this informal meeting alone some 20 tours had silently passed through the visitors' balcony, allowing outside guests to witness the work of the United Nations, without interrupting Member States' deliberations. At the same time, she acknowledged the need to always improve and to provide even more clarity in the way services were provided to the membership.

13. The **Under-Secretary-General for Safety and Security** stressed DSS's mission to provide safety to the diplomatic staff and the UN Secretariat staff alike. In

this, a balance needed to be struck between strictness and unobtrusiveness, which was even more important bearing in mind the current threat level which was higher than probably any time before in the Organization's history, citing in particular the threat of terrorism. As a result, the closer one got to a restricted area, the tighter would be the security. Similarly, security was higher and more visible during high-level events, such as in September. Clearly, there was **always room for improvement**. As for DSS, a briefing was provided in advance of the high-level week at the opening of the regular sessions of the General Assembly every year. The Department also had **a dedicated liaison officer to work with Member States**. The Under-Secretary-General also took the opportunity to thank the Permanent Missions for their cooperation and the support received from them. In conclusion, he invited Permanent Missions to send any requests that could not be answered by his staff to his office, and promised to reply personally to them.

14. Before concluding, the Vice President ventured a question of his own, i.e. as to the **state of the Organization's preparedness in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development** and **whether the Secretariat was repositioned** to lend its support to Member States, which he specifically addressed to the USG of DGACM. In response, the **Under-Secretary-General** stressed that the Secretariat was certainly in a state of readiness and enthusiastic on the 2030 Agenda as it was looking forward to contributing to its effective implementation. To this end, the Organization was positioning itself to advance the Sustainable Development Goals. A lot of work was taking place in the EOSG, in consultation with all parts of the UN system, to prepare for the required follow-up processes. A number of meetings would be taking place in 2016, some of which were led by the President of the General Assembly. The forthcoming Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review would also provide a critical input and contribution to this larger objective. Consideration was furthermore taking place in a systematic manner at the senior level in the UN's Development Group and in the Chief Executive Board. In sum, several strands were advancing at the same time and the Organization was fully seized by the impetus to advance the 2030 Agenda. DGACM, in cooperation with other Departments and entities of the United Nations system, would play its part in this important work.
