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Statement by Cherith Norman, Minister Counselor for UN Management and Reform

On Agenda Item 139: Human Resources Management

Fifth Committee, Main Session of the 71st UN General Assembly

October 26, 2016

Thank you, Madam Chair.

I want to begin by expressing my appreciation to Under Secretary General for Management Mr. Yukio Takasu, Director of the Ethics Office, Ms. Elia Yi Armstrong, and the Chair of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, Mr. Carlos Ruiz Massieu, as well as the Inspector for the Joint Inspection Unit, Mr. Rajab Sukayri, and the Senior Adviser on Information Management and Policy Coordination, Mr. Kenneth Herman for presenting their respective reports on Human Resources Management.

As correctly pointed out in the Secretary-General's report, many of the human resource management reform initiatives are fragmented and require full integration and proper implementation. As we await the integrated update of the HRM framework to be presented in the 73rd session, we should not lose focus on our ultimate goal -- to ensure the UN is as effective, efficient, and as nimble as it can be through managing its workforce strategically.

Madam Chair,

The United Nations plays a crucial role in forging the path to a more just and peaceful world, and the Organization has no greater asset than the dedicated women and men who serve the UN. For these reasons, the United States believes this agenda item of Human Resources Management must remain a priority for this Committee and the Organization writ large.

If people are the most important asset of the Organization, it is equally crucial to recruit talent expediently and retain this talent, promote career development, reward good performance and establish a system to improve poor performance. Unfortunately, trends such as the on boarding process that can takes more than six months, and rosters that include candidates no longer interested or qualified, have been a common practice for too long. A system designed to allow the staff to move quickly to meet evolving needs has not been tightly integrated into the greater

HRM framework. Further improving and modernizing where and how UN staff work, such as through flexible work arrangements, will allow the Organization to be more efficient in delivering its mandates -- a model that has already become a common practice in other major international entities. Efforts to address these shortcomings will have a lasting impact on the Organization, and consequently, a failure to take action will also cause harm to the Organization in the long run.

The United States commends Secretary-General Ban's efforts to improve the human resource management of the Organization, including the harmonization of contracts and conditions of service in the UN and as well as seeking to make staff more mobile. Going forward, we further encourage the Secretariat to streamline and prioritize its work that will result in real and tangible improvements that create greater transparency, effectiveness, and accountability.

Madam Chair,

It has been several years since this committee adopted a human resources management resolution, and we believe this session is our time to take action. Stalling further will not only disservice the current staff, but also future staff.

Our delegation believes that the United Nations must prioritize and implement comprehensive workforce and succession planning that aligns human capital with mandate requirements for today and the future. The UN must also continue to recruit and retain the best talent possible. On recruitment, we are encouraged by the positive steps already taken, including online pre-selection exams, as we believe this will help expedite the selection process. The United States also fully supports streamlined contracts and conditions of service, which allow easier movement of staff between headquarters and the field; relatedly, we are hopeful that the Secretariat will apply lessons learned to make the mobility program a truly effective management tool.

Additionally, it is of paramount importance that the Organization continues to cultivate a culture of performance management. UN leadership must be empowered to reward good performers and hold accountable those who fall short. This approach must be led from the top, and work in tandem with a culture that fosters constant and open communication between managers and staff.

Furthermore, we request that the Secretary-General finalize the policy on whistleblower protection as soon as possible, and we encourage the inclusion of whistleblower protection and ethics perception in future staff engagement surveys in order to identify potential improvements. We are pleased with the increased coordination between headquarters and the field in implementing ethics related policies and procedures, and we strongly encourage that coordination to continue.

Finally, noting the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goal on female empowerment, along with the strong female representation on the bureau of this committee, we urge the

Organization to become a leader in empowering women in the workforce, including increased gender parity across the UN system.

Madam Chair,

Our delegation believes now is the time to take a hard and honest look at what we as the Committee would want the Organization to be and where we want the organization to head in the future. This is an opportunity to transform the bureaucracy and shape its effectiveness -- and relevance -- in the decades ahead.

Our delegation is committed to working with our colleagues during this important session and looks forward to a productive discussion under your leadership.

Thank you.