

11 December 2015

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the Informal meeting convened by the Permanent Representatives
of Croatia and Namibia in their capacity as co-chairs of the Ad Hoc
Working Group on the revitalization of the General Assembly**

Co-Chairs, Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, good morning to you all.

I regret that I was not able to be here at the beginning including to hear from our colleagues from DGACM and the Department of Management who have been of great assistance to my Office to date.

Let me begin by thanking Ambassador Drobnjak and Ambassador Emvula for organising this informal meeting.

Today we have an opportunity to share views on the transparency, efficiency and accountability of the work of the Office of the President of the General Assembly.

Like all of you, I was greatly shocked by the recent allegations relating to the President of the 68th session, Mr John Ashe.

Those allegations have undermined the integrity and reputation of the Office of the President of the General Assembly, and by extension, the credibility of the United Nations.

It is therefore crucial that both the membership and the Secretariat reflect on how best to protect the integrity of the Office of the President at all times.

As you are aware, the office of the President is already subject to a series of checks and balances including in terms of reporting through the GA Revitalization process audits of the regular budget and the OPGA trust fund and briefings to member states etc.

But there is always scope for improvement and since taking office, I have taken a number of steps in this regard.

First, in response to what I feel was a lack of awareness about the overall functioning of Office of the President, I have developed a background note on the mandate and how the Office is run, financed and staffed, which build on the PGA Handbook developed by Switzerland.

Second, in line with my commitment to transparency, I have published details on the provenance and amount of any contributions made to the OPGA trust fund.

I have provided information online on official travel overseas including on how the costs of those travels were covered.

And I have created a dedicated webpage on transparency on my website which includes these and other details. I also outline my activities on my website through a blog, tweets and a calendar.

Third, in the General Assembly Revitalization debate last month, I set out three core principles that I and my office will adhere to during this session.

These principles are focused on ensuring integrity and impartiality; transparency and accountability; and professionalism and effectiveness.

Each of the above steps can help to both rebuild confidence in the Office and to reduce risks of unethical practices.

They are however only voluntary steps and I believe it is important for member states to consider whether some of these steps could become more mandatory.

For instance, informed by the principles I set out for my Office, the Working Group could consider bringing forward an Oath of Office or Code of Conduct that each President would commit to.

Though obviously of a voluntary nature, a commitment from a PGA before the entire membership to such an Oath or Code would carry considerable symbolic and political weight.

The membership could also consider making it mandatory for each PGA to publish information on contributions to the OPGA Trust Fund, and to brief the membership on a regular basis on travel etc.

And the membership may also wish to consider issues relating to financial and other disclosure by incoming PGA's.

As of now, there are no obligations on the President to carry out any disclosure on taking office.

In my own case, I am subject to certain requirements as a member of Danish Parliament but each country has its own approach as it relates to public office holders.

It could therefore be interesting to hear from the Ethics Office on whether a standard disclosure policy or system could be developed for the President of the General Assembly. Examples of existing practice includes that relating to the UN Secretary General and other senior UN officials.

These ideas of course would require careful consideration by the membership over the coming months.

In addition, there are a series of other steps which could be taken which are more administrative in nature.

I would highlight one of these which I feel is particularly important as it relates to financing and equity.

As President, I have been fortunate to benefit from considerable support of the Danish government – in terms of salary, accommodation, some travel costs, 6 staff secondments etc.

Together with the Regular UN budget, the UN staff complement and extremely generous and valuable secondments from member states, this support from my country has reduced the degree to which I have needed to immediately and prior to assuming office raise additional financial contributions from other sources.

Clearly, not all President's will benefit in this manner, particularly those coming from developing countries.

Beyond questions of the Regular UN budget allocation, it is important as a very minimum, that steps are taken to assist the President particularly during the difficult start-up period from the time of election until assumption of office and to put in place a smarter system around financing of the Office of the PGA.

On this and on other matters closer to the daily running of the Office, I would now like to hand over to my Chef de Cabinet, Tomas Anker Christensen.

I thank you very much for your time. I look forward to engaging with you further as we advance together on the four clusters under consideration by the Working Group.