

7 April 2016

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Mogens Lykketoft,
President of the 70th Session of the General Assembly,
At the meeting of the Ad-hoc Working Group on the Revitalization of
the UN General Assembly**

Excellencies, Distinguished Co-Chairs, Under-Secretary-General and Chef de Cabinet Mullet, Under Secretary-General Pollard, ladies and gentlemen, good morning.

This ad-hoc working group deals with many important issues, but following last October's accusations against the President of the 68th session and others, the issue of strengthening the functioning of the Office of the PGA has taken on even greater significance.

Chef de Cabinet Mullet has just briefed you on the report from the Secretary General's taskforce on this matter.

I commend the Secretary General, the taskforce members and all who participated in this exercise.

This is a very timely report.

Protecting the integrity of the Office of the PGA is fundamental to protecting the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN.

It is an office that belongs to the entire membership, one which must always act and be seen to act ethically, fairly and in a neutral fashion.

Any gaps or weaknesses, therefore, which create a risk of corruption or a perception of corruption must be addressed as a matter of priority.

The taskforce report contains many very sound proposals that I encourage you to consider favorably.

The vast majority of these can be acted upon now by the Secretariat and followed up through a supportive mandate from the General Assembly.

In terms of those proposals that relate most directly to reducing risks of financial irregularity, I see the following as being the most critical:

First, on financing, we must ensure that the maximum amount of voluntary contributions to the OPGA flow through the dedicated UN Trust Fund.

Eliminating trust fund transaction costs is essential in this regard.

Furthermore, we must ensure that the funding from the operating budget for OPGA is made available to the incoming PGA during the period leading up to his assumption of duties.

We must also make sure that the PGA is alerted to an accounting complication which arises at the end of the biennium budget. If the then PGA is not alerted to this, it can result in a sudden loss of his or her core funding which, paradoxically, can look like surplus funds in the accounts.

In addition, the timing of the beginning of the PGA's term could be looked at because the hand over in September only weeks before the General Debate, can place significant pressures on OPGA and the Secretariat.

Second, we must ensure maximum transparency around all financial and in-kind contributions and expenditures of the Office.

This can be done, for example, by publishing all relevant financial information; vetting all possible private donations; requiring financial disclosures by the PGA; standardizing secondment arrangements; and formalizing an OPGA annual report on activities, financing and other issues.

Third, we must institutionalize the highest standard of ethics in the Office, including by establishing a Code of Conduct; and providing ethics training for all staff.

Where it has been in my power to do so, I have taken action on many of these issues including by maximizing the use of the Trust Fund; reducing associated transaction costs; publishing as much information as possible on my website; providing financial disclosure in Denmark; and developing a set of Principles of Conduct that I and my office seek to adhere to.

I hope that some of these practices can now be institutionalized.

In addition to these points, however, the Report also touches on issues relating to the effectiveness of the Office more broadly.

Both the report and previous GA resolutions acknowledge that OPGA been transformed over the past 10 years – its workload had increased dramatically and the nature of the work it undertakes has changed significantly.

My Chef de Cabinet will elaborate on this in more detail.

The question then is whether, in this context, the Office of the PGA has the financial and human resources as well as operational systems required to meet these ever-increasing demands.

The answer, as the report notes, is complex.

There is a need for a more detailed analysis of the Office's precise workload and the total resources available to it.

But in my view, some changes can already be made to place it on more solid foundations.

Again, most of these can be done immediately and without any additional financial costs.

First, steps can be taken to make the transition between sessions more seamless including through greater standardization.

My Chef de Cabinet will also elaborate on this.

Second, the funding system of the Office is such that each PGA is required to undertake considerable fundraising.

Voluntary contributions during the 70th session are at the very least three times greater than that provided for in the operational budget.

The overall balance is a matter for the General Assembly but the changes that I outlined just now relating to the Trust fund, will significantly improve the fundraising environment.

Third, the approach to staffing the Office should be reviewed.

OPGA 70 consists of 32 staff.

Over 80% of these come from non-core resources – seconded from Denmark, UN member states and UN system – and are replaced each year.

Secondments brings great benefits – diversity, credibility and expertise – and I am extremely grateful to member states and others for their support.

But such a consistent turnover in staff and such a low number of core staff, in my view, undermines continuity and the overall effectiveness of the Office.

And it potentially dis-advantages PGA-elects from some developing countries who cannot rely on their national administrations for substantial support.

A number of steps can be taken to address this issue.

First, some of the 5 UN positions provided for by the programme should be changed into multi-annual posts, instead of being replaced from year to year.

Second, the current allocation of UN posts is very top-heavy.

These should be re-profiled – increasing the grade of the Chef de Cabinet position, while lowering the grades of some of the other positions, as appropriate.

I also support the Taskforce report’s recommendation that a dedicated and multi-annual P5 position be created in the Office so as to deal with financial, budgetary and institutional memory issues.

Third, consideration should be given to increasing the overall number of core OPGA staff by five or more, within existing resources.

This could include, as mentioned in the report, multi-annual secondments from across the UN system.

A high number of secondments would still be required and each PGA will still have space to shape his or her own office, but I believe these changes would help solidify the foundations of OPGA.

To conclude, Excellencies, last year's allegations shocked and appalled us all.

But today, we have an opportunity to bring OPGA to another level of transparency, integrity and effectiveness.

Many administrative steps can now be taken but I sincerely hope that the General Assembly will build on those steps and provide a clear mandate during this session to help strengthen the functioning of this important office.

Thank you.