

76TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Draft statement on Behalf of the African Group

UNDER AGENDA ITEM 147
“ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE AT THE UNITED NATIONS”

NEW YORK, 15th OCTOBER 2021

Madam Chairperson,

I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the African Group. The African Group would like to thank the Secretary-General for his reports on Administration of Justice at the United Nations contained in documents A/ 76/99 and A/76/140.

Madam Chairperson,

The African Group reiterates the importance of an independent, impartial, transparent, and professionalized administration of the justice system within the United Nations, which should contribute to a responsible management of administrative disputes related to United Nations personnel, in a functional and effective manner. The Group also notes the constrained posed by the Covid 19 pandemic on the United Nations Justice System and commends its efforts to rapidly respond to arising challenges by adopting remote working arrangements and conducting its work in a virtual environment in order to ensure business continuity.

The group is pleased to observe a decrease in the number of applications received by United Nations Dispute Tribunal. We welcome this downward trend as a lower number of cases can be indicative of an improvement of the ecosystem at the workplace. The fact that fewer cases reached the Dispute Tribunal is also a testimony to the critical role Management evaluation continues to play in the smooth operation of an effective system of justice in the Organization. The group further requests the Secretary-General to continue to further report on the measures taken to address the backlog of cases, especially the priority on pending cases of more than 400 days.

Against this backdrop, the African Group will continue to support efforts to strengthen the United Nations' internal system of justice to ensure work-related disputes receive the fullest attention of management and are resolved in a fair, timely and cost-effective manner, particularly in view of the unprecedented cash-strapped situation affecting the Organization. The Group further stresses that the informal resolution of conflict is a crucial element of the system of administration of justice and believes that all possible use should be made of the informal system to avoid unnecessary litigation, since this process is a cost effective means of informal conflict resolution.

Madam Chairperson,

The Group notes with concern that field personnel continues to carry the highest number of caseload, as they face both hardship and stress related to the nature of their contractual status.

The Group also notes that self-representation has slightly declined to 42.77% of overall cases and appreciates the combined support provided by the Office of Administration of Justice's outreach efforts to staff, including by providing sound dispute and appeals toolkits. The Group wishes to reiterate its basic position that applicants who opt to be self-represented have all the necessary information to successfully file a case and be confident to have a fair and satisfactory outcome.

The African Group welcomes the measures taken by the Secretary-General to strengthen the work of the Office of Legal Assistance to better support staff, including by increasing the number of legal officers available to assist them, particularly those working in the field.

In the same vein, and while acknowledging the current financial constraints on the Organization, the Group welcomes the measures introduced by management to increase the handling of the case-load and deem it appropriate

to maintain the half-time judges model, which has proven to enhance the effectiveness of the system of justice.

Madam Chairperson,

In conclusion, the African Group wishes to renew its continued and unwavering commitment to support the Organisation's efforts to improve its Internal Justice System and provide staff member, as its most important asset, the justice they deserve in an impartial, accessible and accountable manner.

I thank you.