The Reform of Human Resources Management in the United Nations System

This brochure contains the policy statement adopted by the executive heads of all organizations of the United Nations Common System in 1998.

The executive heads attribute the highest priority to the reform of human resources management.

Much has already been accomplished, often in the context of the reforms already introduced and designed to increase decentralization and the delegation of authority and to enhance the accountability of managers across the common system.

Human resources management reforms are the key to improving further the capacity of organizations to fulfil their diverse mandates effectively and efficiently; such reforms must uphold and strengthen the fabric of the international civil service within the framework of each organization’s particular structure and personality.

Thus, each reform initiative must be assessed in terms of the impact it will have on promoting an effective, efficient and accountable international civil service and in upholding the Charter principles on which that civil service is founded - namely the allegiance of staff to the organization alone and the reciprocal duty of Member States to refrain from violating the independent nature of the secretariat and the maintenance of the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity.

In this context, it is evident that reforms which have worked well in one or other national setting may not
be equally viable in an international setting. International human resources management involves a more
diverse set of activities, serves a more culturally diverse population and operates in a far more complex
external environment. If these differences are not recognized, whether as a result of ethnocentrism or poor
information, the organizations will find it increasingly difficult to retain the moral authority on which the
successful fulfilment of their mandates depends.

Within this framework, the executive heads are considering the introduction of human resources
management reforms which will:

(i) further professionalize the human resources function in such a way as to ensure that (a) it is seen to be
at the heart of the process of organizational change and (b) becomes a driving force behind strategies
which will change an organization’s culture and management style;

(ii) preserve the moral authority and independence of the international civil service;

(iii) uphold the competitiveness of conditions of service to ensure that organizations can attract and retain
staff of the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity;

(iv) ensure the security and safety of personnel throughout the world;

(v) provide for more efficient and effective selection and recruitment of staff inter alia by giving increased
attention to competency and merit based selection and promotion over other competing priorities;

(vi) intensify efforts already underway to introduce performance management and strengthen
organizations’ managerial competence;

(vii) support the advancement of staff through continuous learning and enhanced mobility both within and
among organizations;

(viii) create a supportive work environment which will promote productivity and enable staff members to
respond to the pressures of work and family life.
For further information about this policy, contact the secretariat of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions, Palais des Nations, 1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland. Telephone: 917 3276