



16 May 2008

OPEN LETTER TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Dear Mr. Secretary-General,

It is without relish that I write this open letter to you. We have sought to meet with you, since you assumed office, to discuss directly with you simmering issues of concern to staff. You have accorded us a couple of perfunctory meetings. You have not responded to a single letter or resolution we have sent to you. The indifference and lack of appropriate response has in the past pressed the staff to express a vote of no confidence in senior administration officials including the Secretary-General.

There is a growing sense that nothing has changed since you assumed office. That sense stems from your declaration during the first meeting with the staff that you would “manage change with continuity” and subsequently reflected in the appointment of senior staff. Most of the senior staff you appointed piecemeal had served in the previous administration, which was dogged by malfeasance. We were surprised that you could appoint the same senior staff in whom the staff-at-large had passed a vote of no confidence. You have, again, appointed to the post of Under-Secretary-General, Department of Management not someone with solid managerial credentials and proven managerial competence but an insider with a mediocre performance record.

It is not coincidental that your administration’s responsiveness to staff concerns is typical of the previous administration and has, by our reckoning, got worse.

We have, since January 2008, appealed to you and the Department of Management to consider the cost of living adjustment for staff, especially those in General Service and related categories, to no avail. There has been no response to our request for clarification on the applicability of the economic stimulus package for the US taxpayers working for the United Nations which was recently passed by the United States Congress.

Both of these issues impact directly on the ability of the staff to weather the financial burden of the significantly increased cost of living. It has to matter that the host country has deemed it imperative to offer a stimulus package to tide over its taxpayers.

The office space planning guidelines for the capital master plan are being rammed through without input from the staff representatives. Proposals are now afloat to pass the increased insurance costs to the staff, to intensify their suffering.

We have brought to the administration's attention, to little avail, the lack of compliance with ST/SGB/2007/6 by the Information Technology Service Division, which renders the United Nations Enterprise Systems vulnerable to unauthorized use and access, abuse and breach of confidentiality especially with regard to communication by e-mail.

We have drawn your attention to actions of your senior staff that represent clear acts of abuse of authority, flouting of Staff Rules and Regulations, circumvention of General Assembly resolutions and the use of SMCC to abet such practices.

We have objected, again to no avail, to the inadequate and inauspicious procedures in implementing the new system of administration of justice, especially the selection of the new Ombudsman. Such indifference has made it difficult to assure our colleagues that they should have confidence in the new Ombudsman. Worst of all, the proposed selection of judges is flouted with conflicts of interest and your proposals disregard the recommendations of the Redesign Panel regarding the jurisdiction of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal. You have proposed in your report A/62/782 to emasculate the Internal Justice Council, the bulwark of the new system of administration of justice and its guarantor of independence. Your proposals restrict the IJC to merely compiling a list of candidates for judge positions.

United Nations reform is critical for the Organization to succeed and ending nepotism, favouritism and patronage is a necessity. Most of the changes we have observed so far appear cosmetic and will not allay the institutionalization of a patronage system, which our Union has been fighting against for years. You have jettisoned the Galaxy system by directly advertising posts in your office but there are no measures to revamp the dysfunctional staff selection system. We have again lost the opportunity to offer overarching reform proposals on human resources management to the General Assembly in a human resources year.

These actions and inactions on your part lends credit to the UN detractors and can only weaken the aura and authority of the United Nations, reflected in the increasing resistance and defiance of the United Nations.

We once again avail the Staff Union leadership to partner with you to steer the reform process back on the right track. The reform process cannot succeed without the support of Member States and staff. It certainly cannot succeed with a disconsolate staff supervised by a managerial team that has been tested and found wanting. It would be distracting for the staff to have to reaffirm a vote of no confidence in you and your senior staff.

Please accept, Sir, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely



Stephen Kisambira
President,
United Nations Staff Union