



Secretariat

IC/Geneva/4471
11 January 1999

Distribution:

1 copy per staff member

INFORMATION CIRCULAR

Subject: Address by Mr. Vladimir Petrovsky
Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations
Director-General of the United Nations Office at Geneva
Palais des Nations, 14 December 1998

It is extremely fitting that we are meeting together while we are in the midst of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights, a very major document for mankind and one of the main driving forces for our Organization.

Much has been said about this subject over this last year, and in particular over the last few days, by the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner for Human Rights and I would like to touch upon a very specific subject intimately linked to human rights, namely the security of our staff working under extremely trying and insecure conditions in many parts of the world. Their lives are at risk every day, and indeed on occasion have been taken, in the midst of conflicts where they are trying to bring help to other fellow human beings suffering from these very unstable conditions. For the first time in the history of our Organization, over the past year, the toll of civilian casualties has surpassed that of military contingents attached to our Organization, a clear sign that increasingly the world-over no-one, recognized governments or guerilla groups, is able to assure the minimum necessary security for UN staff. It would be appropriate in these somber times to pay tribute to our fellow colleagues by observing a minute of silence in their honour.

Under such somber circumstances, it is with relief and joy that we have all learned of the release of our colleague, Vincent Cochetel, the Head of the UNHCR Office in North Ossetia, who is just back with his family in Geneva after almost a year of ordeal as a hostage.

The Secretary-General was among those who played an instrumental role in obtaining our colleague's release and thus proved again his unfailing concern for the security of UN staff.

As we are approaching the year-end holidays, this meeting offers us a good opportunity to reflect together on our year's work and to prepare ourselves to help the United Nations to meet the many new challenges which lie ahead.

In keeping with the framework of the overall reform strategy enunciated by the Secretary-General last year, 1998 has constituted at UNOG a continuation of the reform efforts aimed at enhancing its effectiveness. UNOG's reform efforts are built around two themes:

- further streamlining of UNOG activities in order to run smoother programmes and deliver better services to the member states, and
- adaptation to new realities, new emerging circumstances and new international actors.

In this context I would like to draw your attention to the changes taking place around you and invite you to extend your interest outside your immediate working environment and see for yourself that UNOG is changing and improving. Technological innovation is moving forward in our own daily operations, as well as with regard to UNOG users, Permanent Missions, NGOs and other partners of the civil society. The most noticeable example of this innovation is the technological revolution which is taking place in the Library, in particular the Cyberspace.

During the past year, UNOG has continued to extend its outreach through its increased activities in the fields of cooperation with regional organizations and institutions in Europe and has increased and improved information exchange among these organizations and the Geneva-based programmes. UNOG has explored and encouraged greater interaction between the

United Nations training mechanisms and the academic and research communities in Switzerland.

To strengthen its ties with the civil society, including parliamentarians and city authorities, Geneva, as a repository of know-how has better responded to the needs of law-makers in facilitating access to existing tools for good governance.

The setting-up by the Secretary-General of the Senior Management Group to which I participate through weekly teleconferencing has allowed Geneva to be actively involved in the reform process of the Organization, in particular in the field of human resources management.

As you know, reform is a continuing process, rather than a one-act play. Managers are currently working on the budget proposals for 2000-2001. Although we cannot yet hope for an increase in resources, it is notable that this year the Organization was able to maintain its financial viability and that during the process of the reform the instructions of the Secretary-General not to jeopardise existing posts, have been successfully adhered to. In addition, improved contacts with Headquarters through teleconferencing, which you were all able to experience when the Secretary-General addressed the staff simultaneously in New York, Geneva and Vienna, has been helpful in sharing with you his views on the reform process and its implementation

In the context of administration and management, efficiency efforts are centred around four main areas, namely:

- simplification of processes, procedures, rules and services;
- enhancement of the flexibility and responsibility of line managers with concomitant accountability;
- expansion and strengthening of common services and equitable costs recovery for services rendered to extrabudgetary activities;
- enhancement of information technology tools to further the goal of creating an electronic United Nations;

In conjunction with these efforts is the need to yet better define the lines of communication and authority between Headquarters and UNOG and to complement any delegation of authority with increased responsibility and accountability of staff and in particular of managers. In this connection the adoption by the UN General Assembly of the revisions to the Staff Rules and Regulations - referred to as the United Nations Code of Conduct - is extremely helpful in introducing a new organizational culture of empowerment, responsibility and accountability.

For managers the new management culture aims at empowering them to administer the full range of resources at their disposal including staff. This implies that managers will be held fully accountable not only for achieving objectives, but also for the effective, proper and efficient management of the resources placed at their disposal and in particular human resources.

It is clear that delegation will be done on an incremental basis and take place gradually to ensure that appropriate guidelines, monitoring and accountability mechanisms are put in place and that managers are ready and indeed able to take on their added responsibilities. Thus staff and managers, in particular, will be given the opportunity to learn new skills so as to be able to assume their new roles in every sense of the word.

As the Secretary-General has indicated in his report on Human Resources Management: "At the heart of the reform process is the need to align the Organization's human resources capacity with its mission, structure and culture. A more focussed Organization moving forward to meet increasingly complex and inter-related mandates in a more efficient and cost effective manner will require significant investment in its most important resources, its "people".

At UNOG efforts have been made in the staff development field through the people management training programme which has been introduced for Professional staff and which has been very favourably received by all concerned. A new pilot programme for staff in supervisory positions has been started and will continue to be offered to all staff in such positions. We also intend to expand our staff development programmes to provide a framework for continuous learning which will allow each staff member who so wishes to further his/her skills or acquire new ones. This should render each of you more versatile, adaptable and mobile and thus enhance your career opportunities.

In a first step, we are also trying to better define the existing competencies of our staff through the development of a skills inventory system where all of you have recently been asked to provide additional information regarding your skills which will allow the Organization, and indeed the staff, to more aptly define potential career paths. I hope that you will all find time to contribute to this very important endeavour which ultimately will benefit all staff.

The new organizational culture involves a partnership between managers and staff. It therefore requires the fostering of an atmosphere of mutual trust between staff and managers. Without a true commitment of all concerned to change and improvement, the reform efforts cannot succeed. It is, therefore, essential that channels of communication remain open at all levels of the Organization, especially at UNOG where very diverse substantive programmes and activities are carried out in the economic, social, human rights and humanitarian fields. In this respect I believe that the Round Table process put in place in Geneva provides for a natural communication link with the participation of officially recognized staff representatives. It is equally important that appropriate information sharing be ensured and that a true dialogue takes place, not only at the global level in Geneva, but also between managers and staff at each level of the Organization.

I would wish now to share with you some thoughts on the future. Before doing so, however, I would wish to touch upon a problem which has started to be addressed, but which will require all our attention in the near future, so as to ensure that we can successfully overcome it when the time comes. I want to speak about what is colloquially known as the "Year 2000 bug", a problem the entire world will have to face at the beginning of the forthcoming century. We have already taken a number of measures at UNOG to ensure that our equipment is rendered Year 2000 compatible, but I would like to make a general plea to all of you to assist us further in that task. Each of you is uniquely situated in his/her own area of work and expertise to assess what may be needed. We would therefore welcome your ideas and suggestions in this regard. A poster campaign will take place in early January 1999 to promote awareness of this problem and to indicate how best all of you could help and participate in this effort.

As regards the future, we all know that our financial situation remains critical and the financial crisis has made life more complicated for the Secretariat as a whole and for all of us here at UNOG. We are and will continue to be required to face the many mandates given to us by the General Assembly with reduced resources. Let me on this occasion echo the Secretary-General in emphasizing that the manner in which staff in Geneva has confronted such problems has been most impressive. It has only confirmed your high quality and your fundamental commitment and loyalty to the United Nations. Let me, however, state my conviction that this crisis has also brought opportunity and led us to a process of reform which is both necessary and healthy.

I would wish to touch upon another key issue to which I am fully committed - the situation of women in the Secretariat and more particularly in Geneva. We are all well aware that, while a certain progress has been achieved during the past few years, the targets set have not been attained. With regard to Geneva, I will hold discussions with all my senior colleagues in departments and offices to ensure that this issue is vigorously tackled so that the just aspirations of our women colleagues could become realities. As a practical step, I intend very soon to nominate another Coordinator on Gender Issues who will advise me personally of the progress achieved.

In the area of staff representation, we have and will continue what I hope is a fruitful dialogue with our colleagues of the Coordinating Council, the officially recognized body for staff/management relations in Geneva to ensure the conditions of service of staff in Geneva are fully integrated in the reform process and that decisions which may have to be taken for the staff at large are discussed and resolved at the Geneva level through a consultation process.

The list of issues placed in front of the United Nations for consideration and resolution by the General Assembly and indeed the world at large grows ever larger and more complex. While some of these problems defy immediate settlement, new concerns are added almost on a daily basis to the multilateral agenda. Yet more resources are not forthcoming. Indeed they have diminished. It hardly needs to be emphasized that the most dedicated efforts are required from all of us. Personal involvement and a high degree of "team spirit" are essential. We must, every one of us, strive to ensure that our own work can be performed more effectively and more economically. We must also act together, conscious that we face common challenges. We depend upon each other if we are to meet these successfully.

No chain is stronger than its weakest link. Every single staff member is important and crucial to the success of our common effort. Every one has a vital contribution to make, one which deserves full recognition. We have to form a team, a winning team, for it is not some abstract mandate that we undertake. We have to respond not only to Member States but also to the aspirations of those millions of our fellow men and women who look to the Organization as protection for the oppressed, relief for the hungry, shelter for the homeless and displaced and security for those ravaged by conflict.

In closing I would like to extend to you and your families my very best wishes for the end-of-the-year holidays and inform you that it is my intention, bearing in mind the exigencies of the service, to request managers to release staff in the afternoon of the 31st of December so that all of you can prepare yourselves to happily cross over to the New Year.