

United Nations Nations Unies

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REFERENCE:

22 May 2008

Dear Mr. Kisambira,

I refer to your “Open Letter” to the Secretary-General dated 16 May 2008.

First, I must say I find the negative tone of your letter unhelpful, and your representation of several issues to be misleading, incomplete or incorrect. Frankly, I am surprised that you chose to take this step, especially in view of the progress that I believe has been made on some key fronts. Allow me to address some of the points raised in your letter.

The Secretary-General came into office committed to change, intent on strengthening the Organization and making it more efficient, transparent and well-managed. He very much welcomes the scrutiny of Member States, as well as the staff. A concrete example was the publication of the Senior Compacts in i-Seek as well as the publication of the financial disclosures and the accountability survey in which more than 40 per cent of staff participated. He is sensitive to staff concerns, and wants to have honest and productive staff-management relationship as he personally has expressed in the various meetings held with you.

The Secretary-General takes very seriously his senior appointments, and has full confidence in the individuals he has selected. He makes his expectations on performance very clear, through the Senior Managers Compacts, which are shared with all staff. For you to publicly criticize his selection of the new Under-Secretary-General for Management, who herself is a staff member with many years of loyal service to the Organization, I find reprehensible.

You make complaints in your letter about the office Capital Master Plan office guidelines, about the cost-of-living and about insurance costs. However, you make no mention at all of what I believe has been an important achievement: the establishment of the Headquarters Joint Negotiation Committee (JNC) in replacement of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), where all of these issues have been raised and are being addressed. The Secretary-General has demonstrated that he takes this Committee seriously, by personally meeting with the whole Staff Committee and signing the Secretary-General’s Bulletin establishing the Committee last June. During our JNC meetings I have indicated that management agrees with the principle to move from a consultative to a negotiating format also at the global level, which would require working towards replacing the existing global mechanism from within.

In your letter, you make vague allegations of abuse of authority, flouting of rules and circumvention of General Assembly resolutions by senior staff, and the “use of SMCC to abet such practices”. I think it is unwise and unfair of you rest to make such sweeping, unjustified statements. The Secretary-General is meticulous about having


ethical behaviour at all levels, and consistent adherence to rules. I would advise you to study the recently issued ST/SGB on the prohibition of discrimination, harassment and abuse of authority, which sets out a very robust system describing responsibilities and corrective measures.

Regarding administration of justice, the approval by the General Assembly in December 2007 of a new system that is more professional, better resourced and more transparent was a tremendous achievement. Still, you continue to complain and object about process, even though this is an area where we have negotiated more intensively with staff than on any other issue. I find your reference to “indifference” insulting: on the contrary, I and my team have invested innumerable hours on this issue including many days and nights responding to the queries of Member States in the Fifth Committee, defending loudly the interests of staff particularly the Office of Legal Assistance and the Internal Justice Council. I will continue to do so until my last minute as Under-Secretary-General for Management, to ensure that we have a new system in place by January 2009. The process for selecting the Ombudsman and the Internal Justice Council (IJC) conformed completely with resolution 62/228. The Executive Office of the Secretary-General directly is fully supporting the work of the Internal Justice Council, in full accordance with what the General Assembly has mandated.

Finally, you make reference to the staff selection system and human resources reform proposals. I fully agree with you that there remain many steps to be completed. We all agree the reform process cannot succeed without the support of Member States and staff. That is why, as the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General and I have repeated many times, it is important to find the best global forum where staff associations can make their voices heard, and work with management to develop proposals. I recently requested all duty stations and offices away from Headquarters to conduct a consultation with all staff associations on the topics that need to be discussed at the global level. Through the JNC, I also invited you to make your suggestions on staff selection, continuing contract, administration of justice and the proposals to reform the SMCC itself. Still you fail to mention all these discussions in your letter.

It has been and still is my hope that you would choose to engage in a productive and transparent dialogue in which you present the views of your constituency with legitimacy and true representation. However, the choice is yours to make.

As I am leaving my office very soon, I truly hope that with my successor and with the head of OHRM, the leadership of the Staff Union of New York will fully embrace the unique opportunity of having a Secretary-General that is committed to partner with staff globally in a constructive way in the interest of the United Nations and its mission.

Sincerely yours,

 Alicia Bárcena
 Under-Secretary-General
 for Management