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POSTAL ADDRESS — ADRESSE POSTALE : UNITED NATIONS, NY 10017  
CABLE ADDRESS — ADRESSE TÉLÉGRAPHIQUE : UNATIONS NEWYORK

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL  
CABINET DU SECRÉTAIRE GÉNÉRAL

REFERENCE/RÉFÉRENCE :

23 July 2010

Dear Colleagues,

I know many of you have been following developments regarding the departure of Ms. Inga-Britt Ahlenius upon the completion of her term as Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services. I would like to address some of the issues concerned.

Any Secretary-General must strike a proper balance between his role as chief administrative officer and a global leader. With the strong support of staff, the Secretary-General has worked to champion the Millennium Development Goals, fight climate change, promote women's empowerment, and advance the United Nations wide-ranging efforts for peace. As part and parcel of that mission, he is firmly committed to building a stronger Organization that can deliver better not just for the people we serve, but also for you, the people who serve.

Leadership comes from teamwork. Every member of the senior management team is responsible for contributing to our collective wisdom through constructive debate and criticism. The end-of-assignment report is a valuable tool. It is rightly meant to be a frank assessment; it is also meant to be a purely internal document for the benefit of senior managers. It is regrettable that this basic tenet was violated.

We are now examining the report of Ms. Ahlenius in its entirety. Where there are constructive suggestions, we will take action. Where there are inaccuracies – and there are, in fact, many – we will correct them. Turning to some of the specific allegations, I would like to set the record straight.

First, the Secretary-General is conducting a review of the UN ability to investigate itself, particularly in areas where OIOS is not active. Far from undermining the authority of the OIOS and its head, as alleged, he has been undertaking this exercise in full cooperation with OIOS and other relevant departments. With respect to the Procurement Task Force, its mandate was not extended by the General Assembly but it was clearly understood that its capacities would be incorporated permanently into the Investigations Division of OIOS. The Office was thereby strengthened.

Second, the Secretary-General fully recognizes the independence of OIOS. But operational independence does not mean being above the rules that apply to all of us. Adherence to these rules is the only way to build a modern UN, including with true gender balance. Unfortunately, in the one major instance referred to in the report, the case of the Director of the OIOS Investigations Division, basic procedures were disregarded, as determined by a review panel enlisted by OIOS itself. This prevented an early decision from being taken. In another similar case within OIOS, the process was adhered to and it was possible to take a quick decision.

Third, the Secretary-General is committed to building a stronger, more flexible and accountable Organization. That is why he has strengthened the Ethics Office, implemented voluntary financial disclosure, introduced a new internal justice system, and started the practice of publicising Annual Accountability Compacts for senior managers on iSeek. These are genuinely new ways of doing things. We will try to improve these measures, and put new ones in place, to ensure that we uphold the highest standards of integrity and professionalism.

The Secretary-General places the highest priority on the work carried out by OIOS. Its mission is vital to the accountability and performance of the entire Organization. The Secretary-General is finalizing the appointment of a candidate to head the office. An announcement is expected shortly once the General Assembly gives its approval to his nominee.

Finally, on behalf of the Secretary-General, I want to thank the staff of OIOS for their dedication and hard work under difficult circumstances. You and all UN staff have our commitment to continue to take every opportunity to strengthen the Organisation so that we can all effectively carry out our important work.

Yours sincerely,



Vijay Nambiar  
Chef de Cabinet