

**UNITED NATIONS COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS
ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION**

FOURTH SESSION

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Distinguished Members of the Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you to the Fourth Session of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration. As you know, this year is marked by a number of important events regarding the five year review of the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals which will culminate in a high-level summit of the General Assembly in September 2005. As highlighted by the Millennium Development Project Report, issued in January of this year, if the world achieves the MDGs, more than 500 million people will be lifted out of poverty. A further 250 million will no longer suffer from hunger. 30 million children and two million mothers who might reasonably have been expected to die will be saved.

As recognized by a number of United Nations international conferences and by the above-mentioned Millennium Project Report, to achieve the Millennium Development Goals requires a commitment to good governance. "This includes upholding the rule of law through administrative and civil services and through legal and judicial institutions. It includes promoting human rights, particularly civil liberties and political freedom. It also includes sound economic choices, especially for macroeconomic policies and regulatory frameworks. And it includes transparent, participatory and accountable decision-making processes. These critical elements of governance serve as vital complements to the scaling-up of public sector management capacity". There is no more urgent task in developing countries than that of revitalizing the way government institutions operate and the rules that underpin their functioning. Even the best designed policies are of little use if the State does not have the capacity to carry them out. States that cannot count on

effective and efficient institutions; adequate public service delivery; skilled and competent civil servants; as well as modern technologies and tools to carry out its many functions, cannot provide the framework for effective participatory governance and respond to the increasing needs of complex societies.

Given the central role played by good governance and public administration in attaining the MDGs, the work of this Committee, which –as you know- is the main body of the United Nations dealing with issues related to public administration in the inter-governmental process, is ever more relevant. Over the next days, this Committee is called upon to consider and debate a number of significant items for socio-economic development. Let me briefly summarize the strategic role of this Committee.

First, the Committee provides a set of recommendations in the field of public administration for consideration by the Economic and Social Council, Member States and the Secretariat. One of the key recommendations to ECOSOC set forth last year by the Committee in its final report was that it should consider devoting one of its next high-level segments to the role of public administration and the attainment of the MDGs.

Second, the Committee plays an important role in identifying the emerging issues and challenges in revitalizing public administration, especially in developing countries. Three issues seem of critical relevance in the years to come, particularly in view of the challenges posed by the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and by recent events of great impact such as the September 2001 terrorist attack and the December 2004 Tsunami in the Indian ocean. These include: (1) Improving Economic and Social Decision Making Institutions and Processes; (2) Strengthening Integrity, Transparency and Accountability; and (3) Reconciling Security Requirements with Demands for Social Service Delivery.

With reference to the first issue, the main challenges are: how to make public institutions and institutional processes more participatory and relevant for poverty eradication, and how to manage scarce resources with a particular focus on aid management. In this

respect, I wish to mention that the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development held in 2003 and the recent report of the Millennium Project task force headed by Jeffrey Sacks have called for a major increase in the resources to be transferred to developing countries to fight poverty, disease, illiteracy and environmental degradation. A vast amount of resources will also be required for the reconstruction of areas hit by the recent Indian Ocean Tsunami. In the face of these potential new and massive transfers of resources, the donor community is very concerned about the ability of many recipient countries to manage and account for in a transparent and efficient way for resources. Doubts about corruption, waste and mismanagement of these funds continue to have a chilling effect on the willingness of contributing countries to increase their development outlays.

Integrity, transparency and accountability in government are also critical in ensuring that the principles contained in the MDGs are translated into daily action, i.e. in ensuring that government officials act in open, transparent, and accountable ways in managing scarce resources and that they take decisions in the public interest. The second major challenge for public administration is therefore that of building and strengthening management and accountability systems, promoting integrity in the public sector, fighting corrupt practices; developing transparent and fair public procurement systems; introducing financial and management control and evaluation mechanisms, maximizing the utilization of ICT, for efficiency and transparency. By addressing these challenges, countries will not only facilitate the flow of additional resources for development, but will also ensure that these resources be used efficiently, effectively and thus maximize their impact on the development process.

The third challenge is related to the shift of focus in the agenda of many governments from social and economic development to security issues. This shift creates a major disconnect between those who strongly believe that the State has an important role in facilitating socio-economic development, the achievement of the MDGs, the protection of the environment, etc. and those who, due to recent world-wide events, view the State's primary role that of combating terrorism, ensuring safety and security and fighting cross-

border criminality. Whereas some Governments have decided to react to these challenges by heavily investing in security issues while neglecting the other fundamental dimension of providing social services and attending to the needs of the poor, a more balanced and integrated approach to these challenges is that of resuming both concepts under the umbrella of “human security” which should be further explored.

The third area in which the Committee of Experts on Public Administration can play an important role is in enhancing the visibility and transferability of the innovations that are taking place in public administration in all corners of the world. Focusing on innovations is particularly important in a time when resources are scarce and the public service needs to regain credibility. The United Nations Public Service Awards, which is now at its third year, was launched in order to contribute to the promotion and support of efforts to improve the performance of the public service in Member States. In particular, the UN Public Service Awards is intended to reward service to citizens and motivate public servants worldwide to sustain the momentum of innovation and the improvement of the delivery of public services; to collect and disseminate successful practices and experiences in public administration in order to support efforts for improvement in country level public service delivery; to counterbalance, through success stories, any negative image of public administration, raise the image of public servants; as well as promote, encourage and facilitate networking among institutions and organizations relevant to public administration.

Sharing information and transferring knowledge on best practices is a very important tool in stimulating and inspiring governments to introduce innovative practices and provides a fertile environment for the replication of successful reforms. Moreover, focusing on best practices rather than on failures is a way to provide positive incentives for reform efforts and to encourage a positive outlook on development. Sharing of information *per se* is, however, not always sufficient at the implementation level. In fact, best practices are usually documented by example, resulting in only limited transfer of knowledge and ideas between countries and a tendency to "reinvent the wheel". In order to maximize the benefit of sharing best practices among countries and to provide more effective assistance

to interested Governments in replicating specific innovations in public administration, it is necessary to develop a set of tools and methodologies to identify the validity and transferability of national practices and experiences, as well as to identify the steps and requirements of the implementation process. In order to discuss further these issues, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs is organizing this year an Ad Hoc Expert Group Meeting on Approaches and Methodologies to Transfer Best Practices and Innovation in Governance and Public Administration.

A fourth area in which this Committee can provide a valuable contribution is in the refinement of a methodology to define underlying principles, foundations, quality and effectiveness of public administration. The purpose of defining common principles is to establish benchmarks for the improvement of public administration.

During its past sessions, this Committee discussed the possibility that its members elaborate a set of principles and standards which governments around the world would have to adhere to in building and/or fine-tuning their public administration systems. In later discussions, however, it was felt that this type of exercise would be exogenous to country-level specificities and could be regarded as imposed from “above”. The major concern is, in fact, how to address the widely varying conditions in countries throughout the world when determining the principles and foundations of good public administration, which should emanate from citizens concerns and views. In the search for a bottom-up approach for the establishment of common principles, one should bear in mind that different stages of development and the impact of cultural differences act to shape the nature, missions, and performance of public administration systems. Standardized principles are not particularly suited for a diverse world and citizens themselves must be empowered to determine the principles that should inform their public administration system. By aggregating the principles emanating from a bottom-up approach, we could arrive at a set of international principles. The crucial question is which methodology is best suited for this exercise and is the criteria-based assessment process a potentially adaptive solution which the Committee may wish to discuss.

Finally, as it is customary, the Committee will review the activities of the United Nations in the area of Public Administration and in this connection, we look forward to its input and guidance. Among these activities, I should like to single out the hosting of the 7th Global Forum on Reinventing Government at the United Nations in New York in July 2006.

The deliberations that you will make during the next five days are of great relevance in tackling the above-mentioned issues. Your findings and recommendations will be an important input to the work of ECOSOC and in particular to its high-level segment which is devoted this year to the progress made, challenges and opportunities in implementing the Millennium Development Goals.

I wish you a very fruitful and productive meeting and I now turn the floor to Mr. Bertucci.