United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration
Fourth Session, New York, 4-8 April 2005

<u>Agenda Item 4: comments by Mrs. Marie-Francoise Bechtel</u>

Let me first congratulate the authors of this text.
Not only this text takes largely into consideration our debates since three years, but it is also in tune with our yesterday's discussion regarding the first item!
I therefore welcome this anticipatory virtue in which I see the evidence that our work, like the good wines, mature and attain personality after a while in a good barrel- if Mr Bertucci and his team are not offended by this comparison: but everyone understood that the quality of the barrel had a lot to do with it…

By writing this text, the authors were therefore influenced by what becomes a little our common culture and this is noticeable. Yet the presupposed points that we are discussing or that we are approving appear to me almost as important as the conclusions we could attain.

I will therefore analyze the overall logic of this text **(part 1)** then I will provide several specific comments **(part 2)**.

1/   I will summarize the contribution of this text

A.   *First of all, the text emphasizes in a very proper manner on the diversity of experiences* and national frameworks, which is one of the items already tackled yesterday by several speakers.
It appears to me that this observation constitutes one of the established principles of the Committee. Therefore, I won't insist on this point but I would like to stress that it is a thread that appears several times in agenda item 55. And this places the text in line with our last general report: the wine has ripened…. This is as far as the framework is concerned.

B.   Then and as a counterpoint it appears clearly in the text that despite the diversity of the frameworks and needs, *a rational and hence universal tool* of the measure of the public action can be put in place. In order to illustrate their remarks, the authors take the case of the GPP utilized in the US.
Here again it's just like the state of mind of our Committee. For us it is about trying the best we can to highlight tools in which the most administrative systems can identify themselves by avoiding two opposite extremes:

- *The technocratic extreme* which consists in believing that rationality completely guides human action. Yet a rational model is nothing other than a rational model; it doesn't allow us to measure the realities, but the perceptions a society or a group has of these realities. This doesn't mean at all that this model is useless, on the contrary; one has only to understand that this is a tool among others, in this case a tool to measure administrative efficiency. It is also important to stress that even if limited, it expresses, as it is, a relation between the objectives and the means, a relation which may be limited but which allow us to take stock of the situation and go further from the highlighted observations It has to evolve in its critique in order to go further in each step.

- On the contrary, *the refusal of any rationality* in administrative action.
Certainly the environment or the context plays a special role in public administration. But accepting that the latter be assessed in its action, without taking into consideration the political choices of the government, represents the first step towards an approach of monitoring the administration's functioning with regard to the objectives of the public interest, keeping in mind that these objectives are either theoretically, either effectively assigned.
From this point of view, the government's commitment in an evaluation process of their public action is an important step; it is in a way what drives us apart from the administrations of the 19th century.

Yet from this double point of view, it seems to me that this analytical work is very well done in the text. It underlines the limits of the multi-criteria evaluation in the covered areas and the presupposed data (available resources). It demonstrates at the same time that governments would gain in utilizing these rational tools of performance measure.

C. *I now come to the main topic of this text which is the "bottom-up" approach.*
With this approach we will tackle several issues which are attributable to the inner difficulty of this approach. We will note indeed that an evaluation process of the administration is an objective in itself and to link it to a "bottom-up approach" is obviously more difficult than if this process follows top-down approach. At the same time, we mustn't delude ourselves and nothing would be worse than a system supposedly coming from the citizens themselves, which in reality would be driven by experts who would consider themselves appointed by the citizens.

The authors of this text took note and stressed this fact: it is one thing to assess the public administration through a model based on various criteria; it is another one to involve the citizens in this assessment. Yet it is obviously about a strong idea. Many political systems claim to follow this idea, especially in respect of the Human and Citizen Rights Declaration.
The goal is certainly desirable. We could even say that it is the completion of the democracy.
The difficulties of the implementation are nonetheless very big. I will come to this in part 2 of this statement.

II/ Specific comments

They are quite a few; therefore I will only address questions, in order to avoid making this speech too long.

Question n.1

Who conducts the assessment? The authors of this text are very concerned about this difficulty. They point out that we can never be sure that a matter has been referred to the bottom citizen when it has been directed to associations and all active organs of the civil society. The countries in which the social segmentation is important will almost be unable to know the satisfaction index of the citizens, and all the more when such citizen constrained and forced, participates in fact in corruption that completely modifies his expectations towards an administration which has to be secure and fair, even before being efficient.

Question n.2

Can we really rely on participation through ITCs as a satisfactory participation from a democratic point of view? In addition to the case of little equipped countries in computers, the case of developed countries has to be examined; the call for network participation is for some people a path to the future. For others, it is based on an individualistic vision of the needs which is, in the end, not in line with democracy, which is based on the collective debate.

Question n.3

How to take into account the fact that the relation between those who administer and those who are citizens is very diverse? We can envisage assessing public services; it is apparently the most obvious case: are the public transportations, health, and education functioning properly? Even in this area, some difficulties exist; we already debated them last year: can we assimilate the satisfaction of the public services' user to the customer's satisfaction? How to assess the level of legitimate requirements of the taxpayer?
In the area of education for instance, what is the difference between the user and the consumer?

Difficulties become even more formidable when it comes to other type of relation between the administration and the citizens.

Apart from public services, the administration issues norms. And yet regulations tend to proliferate.

 How the citizen can find his way around in?

How to ask the user overburdened with regulations, laws, directives to "participate" while most of the time he ignores his rights and the existing procedures (the right to question a decision, the right to defend him, the right to protect his personal data)?

Altogether I think that it is by addressing the right questions (and there are others) that we make headway.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the authors of this text for not having dissimulated the difficulties; these are inherent in any innovative approach.