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AGENDA ITEM 5  
UN PUBLIC SERVICE AWARDS

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First of all I would like to hail the idea of submitting the process of implementation of the Public Service Awards to a critical analysis: we do what we preach. I would also like to express general agreement with the excellent paper submitted by the Secretariat. Evaluating submissions, comparing and awarding has not been an easy process and the paper has addressed many of the issues faced and came with excellent suggestions which will ease anxiety within the evaluation panel

Sometime in the future, I am sure that we will come to view the current phase as a setting up for a widely recognized and motivating award as its creators intended, an instrument for re-dignifying the *res publica*, recognizing and holding up the values of public service. An award that will make justice to the often underplayed role of millions of committed citizens working all over the world for the public good.

I will make two general comments which may not necessarily translate into changes in the criteria of the awards and then make two organizational proposals.

The comments:

**one**, efforts of institutions to keep working to maintain valid standards and avoiding collapse during crisis and in post conflict situations should be duly recognized; from experience I realize only now, how important it is to keep institutions functioning despite all odds and when it seemed that not much would come out of it. The present optimistic situation in my country, Mozambique wouldn't have been possible if the common civil servant did not think and act for preserving the basic norms and upheld processes in the most unseemly situations. I see many places where civil servants are heeding this call for duty. I will call it **the resilience factor**, as important as transparency and innovation, for instance.

**two**, to recognize -- as a guideline rather than an additional criteria -- openness to cooperate with citizens, to incorporate their ideas and suggestions but also to make use of their civic and professional capacity as partners in implementing solutions. We tend to look up for international aid which is fair given history, in order to equalize odds distorted by domination and terms of trade. But in a world of increasingly scarce financial resources and growing needs, still the long term solution, the only sustainable

one, is to look into ourselves, to look downward in order to discover resources and dormant capacities. It may boil down, in a constructive and innovative way, to the old seemingly forgotten principle of self-reliance.

Now for suggestions on the processing of the awards:

**one**, there seems to be agreement on the difficulty of evaluating fairly: because we are working from the vintage point of an international organization working under an accepted set of principles; and because we have to compare institutions and performances with too different organizational cultures and environments. Accepting one set of principles is one thing; identifying the same common elements in concrete different local situations is another. In this process we find ourselves also at the crossroads of one of the major contemporary dilemmas: how to reconcile the local and the global.

The Secretariat paper makes realistic suggestion such as involving expert to evaluate the proposals and consulting local institutions which could vouch for the nominees. This addresses the danger faced in the past of rewarding institutions very capable of making very good presentations – a laudable fact by itself - without a real positive performance.

Going further, is it not the case that there exists too big a gap between the institution to be recognized through the award and the level processing the decision? Would it be possible to find a way of devising a simple intermediate local (national or regional) mechanism?

I am thinking of a local panel involving three group of partners: the UN who is the initiator of the award, public/academic institutions and citizens/civil society. Each component would mobilize information and evaluation capacity from other sectors. UN would draw support from the donor community and its instruments of evaluation. Public institutions, preferably chaired by a school of administration would liaise with academic institutions and think tanks. Civil society organizations, including users associations will be another component. The local panel would work closely with public institutions in order to disseminate the information as well as with the media.

In a more optimistic scenario, and given the will, a national award would develop, where it does not exist.

This should be seen as an improvement but institutions of countries where such mechanism does not develop will continue to submit their proposals as currently.

**two**, public awareness of the awards. In countries where the tradition of awards for public service is already established, the award itself is a sufficient token of recognition. (in fact, a large number of submissions come from this group of countries). What about countries where the very idea of recognizing publicly and rewarding public institutions is not familiar or not used to promote completion and incentive improvements in the process of governance or service delivery. How to combine reward of existing and well performing services while starting the process in others?

There seems to be an issue of additional marketing here. The Secretariat paper makes some interesting suggestions in that line. It refers for instance to the recognition accorded to winners, to broadcasting their experiences. It suggests inviting the Secretary General himself to be present at the awards ceremony.

The basic idea is to make the Award for the public service, I would say, a more glamorous affair. Is it impossible? May be not if we address ourselves to the right public, the citizens; if we combine some practices of modern marketing with sound political and professional marketing, from increasing the role of UNPAN in the process to publicizing national/regional contests with the participation of regional and national personalities and using regional conferences to deliver the awards.

To make the process more attractive one should consider symbolic and substantive rewards -- study trips, scholarships to be offered in partnership with prestigious learning institutions, free of charge courses, conferences and consultancies defined by winning institutions. Rewards could be individual as well as collective.

By publicizing the more “attractive” contents of the award, a demand- driven competitive process will be started which will ultimately serve the purpose of the award –a better, recognized, valuable Public Service.