*May 10, 1996*

Dear Mr. Cavalcanti,

On April 19, 1996, the General Assembly concluded a week long special session in New York to consider the question of *public administration and development*. It was the first time in the 50-year history of the United Nations that the Assembly met to specifically address this issue. Because of the ministerial or cabinet level.

We are now in the process of preparing several detailed documents and reports which will examine the process, analyze the essence of the final General Assembly resolution, and outline the future plans for the programme. I have enclosed a brief summary of the resumed session, and would appreciate, if possible, for you to include it in the next edition of your publication.

Should you be interested in a more detailed summary, we would be happy to provide you with either a copy of our special issue of the newsletter which was fully devoted to the resumed session, or an article specifically written for your journal that would include an analysis of the key issues making an impact in the field of public administration and development.

Any questions or inquires you may have can be answered by Mr. Guido Bertucci, director of the Division of Public Administration and Development Management at (212) 963-5859 or by contacting myself by phone at (212) 963-8410 or by fax at (212) 963-2916.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best regards.

Yours sincerely,

*Abu Tayeb Rafiqur Rahman*
Deputy Director
In charge of General Assembly Resumed Session
Division of Development Administration

## United Nations General Assembly Session on Public Administration and Development

From 15-19 April 1996, the General Assembly met in a special session to consider the question of public administration and development, in accordance with Resolution 49/136. This resolution was a response to the Tangier Declaration of June 1994, adopted by the Pan African Conference of Ministers on Civil Service which recognized that any sustainable economic and social development must be backed by efficient, competent and responsible administration. Preparations began a year before the actual session, and included the formation of a Technical Committee (among them, the UN, Harvard University, IIAS, and the World Bank), to identify the most important issues making an impact on the field. These issues were refined during the 12th Meeting of Experts on Public Administration and Finance held at UN headquarters in New York in July 1995.

The Meeting's final report was one of two primary documents considered at the session. However, an analytical report on public administration and development produced by the secretary general served as the primary document. Six regional meetings were held prior to the session dealing with the role of public administration in social development (Stockholm, 1995), economic reform (Berlin, 1996), infrastructure development and environmental protection (Rio, 1996), restoring government machinery in situations of conflict (Rome, 1996), economic development (Manila, 1996), and moving from structural adjustment to improved efficiency in government (Windhock, 1996). Each meeting was attended by leading experts in the field, as well as senior UN professionals and representatives of the host country's government.

In addition to the six regional meeting's, a two day International Technical Forum on Public Administration and Development was organized and held at New York headquarters directly preceding the General Assembly Resumed Session. Approximately 300 delegates, directors of national institutes of administration, officials of international, regional and national associations of public management, publishers, technology and consultancy providers and other decision makers from the 135 member States participated in the Forum. There were four components to the ITF: the Professional Colloquium, the Executive Session, the Private Sector Forum, and the Internet Exposition.

The actual five day Resumed Session saw 72 member States and two observers address the General Assembly on conditions and reform experiences in their respective countries. Ways of strengthening the UN's role in the field of public administration and development were addressed as well. Areas of reforms articulated by member countries included enhanced transparency and accountability; increased responsiveness and effectiveness in meeting public needs; greater emphasis on results and efficiency in the use of resources; decentralization; expanded use of information technology; the advantages of partnerships with non-government organizations and private firms in the delivery of services.

Due to the importance of the session, 33 interventions were made at the ministerial or cabinet level rank. Resolution 50/225 was approved, by consensus, on the final day. It recognizes that there is a need for public administration systems to be sound, efficient and well equipped with the appropriate capacities and capabilities, and calls for the enhancement of the effectiveness of United Nations activities in the area of public administration.

## Public administration and development

This is the sixth and final in a series of periodic updates that are intended to keep all governments, missions and organizations who are active in the field of public administration, informed on the preparations and progress of all activities concerning the Resumed 50th Session of the General Assembly.

### *Resolution adopted*

This Resumed Session was devoted to issues of public administration and their impact on development around the world — the first time that the General Assembly has been convened for any one single subject. The session was addressed by 72 countries which shared their own experiences in making their public administrations more efficient and effective. Thirty-three were represented at either the ministerial or cabinet level and two observers were present as well. The special session concluded on 19 April with the vote, and adoption by consensus, of Resolution 50/225, that had been drafted by Morocco.

The resolution adopted by the GA recommends that the role of the United Nations activities and programmes in public administration is to assist governments in improving their responsiveness in meeting people's basic needs and to achieve sustainable development.

The resolution confirms the importance of the UN programmes on public administration and development, calls for their enhancement and effectiveness and stresses the importance of an increased cooperation among United Nations funds and programmes, the specialized agencies, the United Nations Secretariat and the Bretton Woods institutions. All this is needed to insure that the substantive and technical capacity of the UN system is optimized.

Resolution 50/225 stated that the UN system should focus its activities on the following areas: strengthening government capacity for policy development, administrative restructuring, civil service reform, human resources development, and public administration training; improving performance in the public sector; financial management; public-private interaction; social development; developing infrastructure and protecting the environment; government legal capacity; post-conflict rehabilitation and reconstruction of government machinery; and management of development programmes. In the statements made, there was an emphasis on the need to focus assistance on the building of *sustainable national capacity.* The prioritization of needs and the coordination of assistance was agreed to be a government responsibility.

### *General Assembly debate*

Reform of public administration and governance issues, generally, are proving to be key items on the development agenda of the 1990's. In the debate,

it was striking that all the speakers described changes, often fundamental changes, being made in their public services, irrespective of the position of their countries on the continuum of development. Equally, all countries seem to be looking for the right balance between their public sector and other sectors — without the disabling notion that the public sector can do nothing right and that the private sector can do nothing wrong.

Countries are reacting to a number of driving forces, among which are the globalization of the economy, democratization, environmental pressures, corruption, national fiscal and external deficits, pressures for social justice, the information revolution, and the emergence of the private sector and civil society as alternative suppliers and financiers of a range of public services.

These major trends have increased the complexity of government at a time when faith in governments' ability to govern is at a low. There are strong pressures on governments to reduce their expenditures, particularly by reducing the scope of their activities and transferring their productive functions to the private sector where they are subject to the competitive pressures of the market place. The phrase "steering, not rowing" was used to describe the new paradigm of government which is more "governmentlike", rather than business-like.

Key features of reforms undertaken or planned by member countries include:

- greater *transparency* and *accountability* for decisions made and resources used;
- greater responsiveness and *effectiveness* in meeting public needs;
- greater emphasis on results and *efficiency* in the use of resources;
- *decentralization* of decision-making and accountability to lower levels of government;
- greater use of *information technology*;
- greater use of *partnerships* with non-government organizations and private firms in the delivery of services.

It was agreed by all speakers that decisions on the appropriate scope of government activity, the drawing of the public-private boundary, and the modalities of operation of public services, are contingent on the history, culture and institutional arrangements of each country. There was a retreat from the concept of "ideal practices" or that "one model fits all". No country claimed to be a model for others to follow. On the other hand, some delegates had interesting accounts of reform, and they were very willing to listen to others share their countries' experiences. Speakers from all countries desired to join in international and regional exchanges of information and experience, on the basis of mutual respect.

It was also universally acknowledged that responsibility for public administration and governance rests exclusively with each government, while recognizing the transnational impacts of national policies, and the need for collaborative efforts to face transnational challenges.

## *International Technical Forum*

Thursday 11 April - Friday 12 April

The International Technical Forum was organized by the United Nations DDSMS as part of the preparations for the Resumed 50th Session of the General Assembly. Approximately 300 participants from institutions, associations and organizations of public administration attended from around the world. The three primary sessions were the Private Sector Colloquium, the Professional Colloquium and the Internet Exposition. A summary of final recommendations from each is included below:

### *Private Sector Colloquium*

For any public-private partnership to exist, there must be expectation of social gain on the part of the government, and expectation of private gain on the part of the private partner. These expectations are expressed in contracts, such as outsourcing contracts, turnkey contracts, management contracts, leases, concessions, BOT contracts, contracts of sale in the case of privatization by disinvestment etc. Many governments do not have the capacity to envision the potential for such partnerships; they may not have the technical capacity to structure and negotiate the contracts to apportion risks or make valuations, nor the capacity to monitor and enforce them.

In view of the significant potential for such partnerships, the participants called on the United Nations and the international community to provide increased technical assistance to governments and non-governmental organizations to build on the existing management capacity in both the public and private sectors and strengthen their contracting and project management expertise to promote mutually beneficial partnerships.

In transitional economies where entrepreneurial activities have only recently been decriminalized, and even in mixed economy developing countries, entrepreneurs still face negative attitudes from society and from the civil service. Governments need to lead the re-education of the public, and particularly their own civil services, on the social value of entrepreneurship.

### *Professional Colloquium*

Efficient and effective public administration is the foundation for developing a strong civil society and strong markets. For every country seeking to advance these aspects of its society, public management will require transformations of varying scale and scope.

The United Nations is urged to directly support the efforts of inter-governmental and international, regional and national institutions as an efficient way of collaborating in the critical areas of public service training, research and exchange of information and experiences. This is an effective way of enhancing institutional capacities within the relevant context.

In addition the UN is urged to build its capacity in the area of providing technical support to public administration reforms, so that it can better assist capacity building for governance when requested by member States.

### *Internet Exposition*

The first ever Internet Exposition organized in conjunction with World 2 World Media, Inc., an International Internet Development firm, was held during the International Technical Forum and the General Assembly Resumed Session. The exposition demonstrated how the use of Internet can improve efficiency, accessibility, and communication within public administration. Representatives from World 2 World were available to teach participants how to access Internet.

### *Executive Session*

**Tuesday 16 April**

Six high-level leaders of administrative reform efforts from Belgium, Hungary, Malaysia, South Africa, the United States and the European Community met with various United Nations senior-level officials to discuss the relevance of their experiences to the reform efforts of the United Nations.

The working session was co-hosted by the under-secretary general for Administration and Management, Mr. Joseph Connor, and the under-secretary general for Development Support and Management Services, Mr. Jin Yonjian. The event was sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

The following six government officials participated in the informal working session: Mr. Mazlan Bin-Ahmad, director-general for Public Service, Malaysia; Ms. Elaine Kamarck, senior policy advisor to the vice-president, United States; Minister Giovanni Motzo, cabinet minister of Institutional Reform, Italy (on behalf of the European Community); Dr. Zola Skewiya, minister of Public Administration, South Africa; Dr. Imri Verebelyi, government commissioner for the Modernization of Public Administration, Hungary; and Mr. Jacques Van Haverbeke, deputy chief of State, Ministry of Public Administration and Internal Affairs, Belgium.

### *Press Conference*

**Friday 19 April**

Mr. Ole Ingstrup, senior adviser to the Privy Council Office of the Government of Canada, and Dr. Zola Skewiya, minister of Public Administration of South Africa, were present at a press briefing held after the General Assembly Session on Public Administration and Development.

Mr. Ingstrup said that many delegations expressed the view that there was a need to focus on ways in which the public sector could become more responsive to the needs of politicians, citizens and other sectors of society.

There is a need for honest, ethical administrations, freedom from corruption, equal access to services, equal opportunities for citizens, participatory decision making processes and effective and efficient administration. He also expressed appreciation for the valuable work the United Nations is doing in those areas, even if, Mr. Ingstrup said, effectiveness and efficiency could be improved also by means of improving cooperation with inter-governmental and regional organizations.

Mr. Skewiya from South Africa praised the United Nations for organizing a special session of the resumed session in which some of the problems South Africa is facing now were highlighted. At such gatherings, countries are able to share experiences and to learn from each other. In the case of South Africa, Mr. Skewiya said that the country, in the post-apartheid era, needs a new direction, a new approach and a new culture in its public services. The delivery of public services would never be possible, he added, without a public administration that is legitimate and trusted by the people.

Mr. Guido Bertucci, director, DPADM, was also present at the Press Conference. He discussed the importance of the General Assembly Resumed Session and its historical relevance to the field of public administration and development.

## *Receptions*

Three receptions were held during the International Technical Forum and the General Assembly Resumed Session on Public Administration and Development.

**Thursday 11 April**

Hosted by the New York Institute of Public Administration.

**Friday 12 April**

Sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.

**Tuesday 16 April**

Sponsored by Coopers and Lybrand, New York University, Columbia University, Baruch College, New School for Social Research, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, and American Society of Public Administration.

## *Follow-up and final documents*

Brief summaries of the conclusions and recommendations of primary documents of the resumed session have been prepared and are available. In addition, copies of the report of the secretary general on public administration and development (A/50/847), the report of the Group of Experts on Public Administration and Finance (A/50/525), the six regional meetings (social development, Stockholm, 1995; economic reform, Berlin, 1996; infrastructure development and environmental protection, Rio, 1996; restoring government

machinery in situation of conflict, Rome, 1996; economic development, Manila, 1996; and moving from structural adjustment to improved efficiency in government, Windhock, 1996), and the final reports of both the Private Sector Colloquium and the Professional Colloquium are available in the DDSMS library located in DC1-1250, telephone (212) 963-2306 or you may contact Mr. A. T. R. Rahman at telephone (212) 963-8410, fax (212) 963-2916.

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