



**Remarks
by**

**H.E. Mr. Noel Sinclair
Deputy Chef de Cabinet of the 68th Session of the United Nations
General Assembly**

on behalf of

**the President of the 68th Session of the United Nations
General Assembly**

**New York
16 May 2014**

**Ad Hoc Working Group Meeting on the
Revitalization of the Work of the General Assembly**

Please check against delivery

Excellencies,
Distinguished Representatives,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take you back to December 4th, the day President Ashe delivered the statement opening the consideration of the item now before us. On that occasion he declared that he was mindful of the specific responsibilities which Resolution 67/297 had given to the Presidency, and that it was his intention to comply with them both in their letter and their spirit.

I believe that the focus of this fourth thematic cluster. “Strengthening the institutional memory of the Office of the President of the General Assembly,” allows the President, through the mouth of his Deputy Chef de Cabinet, to share with Member States his ideas and experience of the role, the mandate and the activities of the Presidency of the Assembly. In addition, so as to help ensure that all successive Presidents benefit from the experience of their predecessors, this presentation will also identify areas in which it is believed that future presidencies could possibly benefit from the experience of the 68th session.

As Member States are all well aware, Chapter IV of the United Nations Charter, adopted in 1945, sets out the functions and powers of the General Assembly, and, by implication, those of its President. The Rules of Procedure provide further clarification with regard to the mechanics of the discharge of the role of the President. While the substantive role of the President of the General Assembly is lacking in terms of specific definition, additional mandates and responsibilities have been conferred on him in past resolutions, such as 59/313, for example. Also, with the passage of time, the international environment has become increasingly complex.

The agenda of the General Assembly has expanded. Implementation of previously-adopted decisions has come to demand a significant portion of the time and energies of Presidents. Member States place additional responsibilities on the Assembly which, in turn, gives additional mandates to the President. In other words, the role of the President - as manager, as coordinator and as facilitator of the business of the Assembly – is continuously evolving and expanding.

The 68th Session, for its part, has been one of an exceptional variety and intensity of action, mostly in light of its proximity to the year 2015, the target-date for the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals and the date by which a new development agenda needs to be elaborated and adopted. Having selected his theme, “Setting the Stage” the President scheduled three High Level Events and three Thematic Debates, which have either been already executed or are currently in execution, and each of which is intended to feed into the elaboration of the post-2015 development agenda.

A special interactive meeting with civil society preceded the series of events, while a stock-taking activity will be organized in September, for the purpose of extracting the results and lessons of the various processes and conversations developed during the current session of the Assembly.

Several additional informal meetings of the General Assembly have been held, either mandated by GA resolutions, or in view of the perceived usefulness of stimulating open and frank exchanges between Member States and other major stakeholders on issues relating to the post-2015 development agenda. The fact that fifteen Co-facilitators have been appointed so far in this session is but one indication of the expansion in the work of the Assembly. Member States know well what has been the impact of post-2015 concerns on the tempo of the current session.

At the same time, the President has also had to be available to respond to requests from Member States for his guidance in a large number of unforeseen situations.

Where activities in relation to the Heads of other major UN organs are concerned, the President has maintained a structured pattern of consultations with the Presidents of the Security Council, with the President of the ECOSOC, as well as with the Heads of sub-bodies such as the Human Rights Council and the Peace Building Commission. The PGA collaborated with the President of the ECOSOC in the holding of a Thematic Debate and Forum on the role of partnerships in the post-2015 sustainable development agenda.

The President traveled to Geneva at the end of February for the opening of the 25th Regular session of the Human Rights Council, and for the High Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament. On that occasion he also met with the Acting Director General of the United Nations Office in that city. In addition to contributing to strengthening relations between the two UN offices, this visit also provided an opportunity for underscoring the Assembly's continuing support for the shared commitment of these two bodies to promoting universal respect for human rights and for nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament respectively.

The President's visit to Geneva was followed by a visit to New York by the Acting Director General, when he addressed the General Committee on the work of the Geneva office. This appearance, in turn, followed the President's earlier encounter with the General Committee, when he gave its members a briefing on the programme of work of the Assembly, in keeping with the commitment he had made in his post-election statement last June, with regard to strengthened relations with the General Committee.

This greatly stepped-up rhythm of the work of the Presidency naturally places a strain on the human as well as the financial resources of the Office. Where the former are concerned, the President's team comprises a collection of officers specially chosen in recognition of their diplomatic formation and experience, their propensity for hard work and their discipline. That choice was also made in a manner which respects the principle of gender balance and, as far as possible, on the basis of geographical distribution. The President is grateful to those Member States, UN agencies and regional organizations which have assisted us in terms of our staffing by making personnel available on secondment.

But what we look forward to more ardently is the ability to place the recruitment of additional staff on a more solid and predictable basis. Such solidity and predictability would be best assured if budgetary provision could be made for at least four additional posts.

More generally where the budget is concerned, it is as striking as it is disappointing to note that the allocation to OPGA from the UN Budget continues at the level of \$300,000, which was approved by the Assembly for the biennium 1998-1999. Since that time, of course, not only have the activities of the Office expanded many times over, but the cost of living in New York has itself increased multiple times, as the Budget Office must certainly be aware. This allocation needs to be supplemented by the contributions which Member States make to the Trust Fund.

These are voluntary in nature and we are grateful for each and every one of them. But we are constrained to request that Member States be mindful that the increased number of mandates being given to the President of the Assembly comes with a huge financial cost. We are therefore requesting their support for an increased allocation from the Organization's budget as well as additional contributions to the Trust Fund.

In addition to the proposals outlined above, I would also like to submit the following for consideration where funding is concerned:

i) The first is that the principle of the provision of a furnished apartment for the President in New York City be accepted. In this way access to the Presidency by a representative of a financially deprived state such as an LDC or one of the SIDS, for example, would not be automatically excluded.

ii) The second is that the OPGA be allocated a separate budget for international travel, so that these expenses do not continue to impose a strain on the Office's allocation.

Operative paragraph 32 of General Assembly 67/297 requested the outgoing Presidents of the Assembly to brief their successors on lessons learned and best practices. It should not be

surprising that the first lessons we learned arose in the process of transitioning from President-elect status to that of President. Chief among these is that the earlier a core group of the Cabinet of the incoming President can be identified and be made available to work along with selected members of the Cabinet of the outgoing President the smoother would be the transition. It is not simply desirable, but essential that at least a small number of staffers of the incoming Cabinet be enabled to have this advantage, so that in a context where the pressures of the start of the new Assembly will be acute, the new Administration will be better placed to make a seamless transition. In keeping with this lesson, President Ashe has indicated his preparedness to facilitate the entry into office of the incoming Chef de Cabinet.

Transitioning is, in turn, closely related both to the strengthening of the staff of the Presidency and to strengthening the institutional memory of the Office. It is acknowledged that there will obviously always be personnel changes, especially at senior levels from one Presidency to the next. But change need not be in conflict with continuity. Our experience has shown us that for staff at the senior level and even below, there is some advantage in the incoming President being able to count on the experience of selected Advisers. In the coming years, the work-load of the Assembly is not expected to diminish.

In this general context of facilitating transition, and of continuity in the midst of change I must pay special tribute to the Government of Finland which has been sponsoring a Retreat in New York, which includes the participation of both the outgoing and the incoming Presidents. This exercise, which has become a United Nations summer tradition, is a particularly valuable one in terms of informally introducing the new President, opening a window to the challenges and hardships that lie ahead, but also giving assurances of the support available.

Among such sources of support are the Under Secretary General of DGACM, his Director of GAEAD, Ion Botnaru and his team of rock-solid supporters. They know who they are and what has been the extent of the support they have rendered us.

But continuing in the context of strengthening institutional memory, I would like to recall a proposal made by the PGA at the opening of the works of this Ad Hoc Working Group. On

that occasion he suggested that, where institutional memory is concerned, it would be unfortunate if incoming Presidents were not enabled to benefit, in a structured and budget-neutral manner, from the accumulated wisdom and acquired experience of former Presidents where management of crises and of the business of the Assembly in general are concerned. He suggested that it should not be beyond the creativity of Member States to identify appropriate ways of making use of those resources.

Now I come to the last lesson which I will share on this occasion, one of whose value the Team is totally convinced, based on our experience.

President Ashe has devised a strategy of reaching out beyond Member States to establish partnerships embracing other stakeholders such as Civil Society, the Private Sector and academia, among others. This strategy has been of critical importance in terms of garnering support for his General Assembly activities. This shows the advantage of a deliberately crafted communications strategy, whose content could include, among other things, training, in advance of the start of future sessions of the Assembly, in the techniques of communications and maximizing its use by senior personnel in future Cabinets.

In conclusion, I would like to take you back to September 24th last year, the day when President Ashe delivered his Statement opening the General Debate. In that utterance, as he reflected on the concept of multilateralism, he declared “Effective multilateralism... requires frank and unvarnished scrutiny of the work of our Assembly, and it is time for us to concede that our efforts at reforming and revitalizing our organization need new impetus.” I assure you that when he made this statement he had not yet begun to turn his mind to Resolution 67/297.

He was simply thinking aloud, sharing with Member States his reflections on the magnitude of the task you had given him when you elected him to the Presidency. He was saying that he recognized the force of inertia whose heavy hand rested on our efforts to bring about

significant change, whether in respect of the General Assembly or elsewhere. And he was signaling that he intended to do his best to encourage us all to overcome that force.

Against that background, now that we have completed our own evaluation of how the Assembly does its work, I expect that we are in a good position to present to that body a set of robust, action-oriented proposals for its consideration and endorsement.

And for the passion, dedication, wisdom, seriousness combined with humor with which the two Co-Chairs, Ambassadors Ružička of Slovakia and Sinhaseni of Thailand have guided, inspired and managed the work of this Group to bring us to this point, I extend a sincere and unqualified word of appreciation on behalf of the President of the Assembly.