



United States Mission to the United Nations

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**Statement by Ambassador Joseph M. Torsella
U.S. Representative for UN Management and Reform,
on the Programme of Work of the Main Session of the Sixty-Seventh Session
of the United Nations General Assembly,
before the Fifth Committee,
October 4, 2012**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and congratulations to you on your election as Chairman of the Fifth Committee. We are grateful for your service and look forward to working with you and other colleagues this session. We are confident that under your leadership we will be able to reach consensus on all of the important issues before us without acrimony, before Christmas, and – hopefully – during daylight hours. As we were often reminded by our immediate past Chairman – whom I also thank for his fine service – as the overseer of UN management, the Fifth Committee should itself set an example of good management practices.

Mr. Chairman,

As we gather here today at the beginning of another session, we are at a crossroads. In his remarks at the opening of the General Assembly last week, the Secretary-General outlined the difficult challenges that we face in the years ahead. Even as those challenges mount, the resources to meet them grow more scarce and precious. The task of this committee is not to bemoan that gap, but to bridge it. If we take the familiar, comfortable path of avoiding difficult decisions, postponing hard choices, and leaving inefficient ways of doing business unexamined, we will add to – not diminish – the UN's challenges. But if we stay on the tougher but better path we started on months ago, by continuing to move the United Nations to a more efficient, entrepreneurial culture, we can equip the organization to meet challenges in development, human rights and peace and security for decades to come.

Human Resources

Mr. Chairman, we all profess that people are the most important element for the success of this or any organization. In past sessions we have made great progress in reforming contracting arrangements and in harmonizing the conditions of service across the UN family. But we have not yet tackled some fundamental questions of how to attract, develop and retain a staff that is right-sized, highly qualified, and appropriately compensated. There is an urgent need to radically transform the UN human resource management system, and we have an opportunity this session to begin that work. To that end, we note the Secretary General's proposal on a mobility framework and his goal of creating a more global, skilled and well-qualified staff, and we look forward to examining this proposal in detail.

However, my delegation continues to believe that piecemeal changes to the current human resources framework should be accompanied by broader structural reforms that address all of the issues. We need to ensure not only that the UN has the right people at the right place and at the right time, but also that the organization that those people are a part of is lean, high performing, and sustainable. We cannot and should not wall off the UN from the measures commonly taken in the private sector and our own governments -- such as pay freezes -- in these difficult times. To that end, we commend the responsible action taken by the International Civil Service Commission in deferring a scheduled pay increase for New York based UN staff this past August. The ICSC's recognition of the need to control staffing costs in a time of global financial crisis is a first step in the right direction. And it is hardly a radical step, especially compared with the actual job losses and salary cuts -- not just freezes, but cuts -- borne by the citizens and civil servants of many member states. It is now up to all of us to rise to the occasion, to match the ICSC in responsible governance, and to adopt this sensible -- and modest -- recommendation.

Budget

Turning to the budget, my delegation is deeply concerned that the gains realized in the 2012-2013 regular budget last December could be eroded due to the fact that the promised new initiatives for savings have not yet been implemented and that potential additional requirements -- including recosting if not managed appropriately -- could significantly add to the agreed budget level. Such a reversal of what was a truly historic achievement by this committee would be a discredit to the United Nations. As we owe it to those who depend on the UN that the approved funds be spent well, we also owe it to the citizens who sent us here -- on whose hard-earned tax dollars we rely -- to live within the budget we agreed to. We believe that the Secretary General took a step in the right direction when he pledged before this Committee last December to continue finding savings in order to make this and future budgets work, and we urge everyone -- staff, managers and member states alike -- to fully support him in that effort.

We further recognize that there will be needs that are truly unforeseen and urgent, especially involving peace and security, or humanitarian crises. However, we must take a tougher line on those activities which could have or should have been foreseen but were not included in the budget and seek their deferral.

My delegation also looks forward to seeing the 2013 budget proposals for special political missions (SPMs), which serve a critical role in promoting peace and security in some of the most troubled areas of the world. We especially commend the Secretariat's efforts, and the efforts of those managing these far-flung missions in the field, to stay within the approved biennium budget level without impacting mandate delivery of these important missions. SPMs are and always have been fundamental to the regular operations and purpose of the United Nations. We look forward to a discussion on the best way to ensure that SPMs are properly supported. And in the preparation and consideration of the 2014-2015 budget outline, the United Nations will have a further, crucial opportunity to demonstrate to our capitals and our citizens that our budgetary accomplishment last December was not an aberration, but truly a new beginning. The early stage preparation of the outline presents an opportunity to transform the way budgeting is done in the UN and to reject the practice of simply using the previous biennium's level as a starting point. We urge the Secretary General to impress upon all managers and staff the

importance of doing a needs assessment from the ground up, with a view to optimizing resources while most effectively delivering on mandates.

CMP and UMOJA

Two budget-related items will get, and deserve, our special attention this session: the Capital Master Plan and Umoja.

We have been encouraged by the recent efforts of Under Secretary General Yukio Takasu and Assistant Secretary General Michael Adlerstein to manage the CMP project more effectively and rein in the significant cost overruns facing the project. We will carefully review the options in the Secretary General's tenth annual progress report on how to mitigate these overruns. However, we continue to stress that we will not support an additional assessment and that every avenue must be explored to bring the project back within the approved budget.

UMOJA is another current initiative of great importance to my delegation and to the better functioning of the United Nations. We thank Assistant Secretary General Ernesto Baca for his capable leadership on this project in coordination with Under Secretary General Takasu and urge them to continue their efforts in this regard. The stakes are high, time is of the essence, and resources are limited. We further encourage the Secretary General to actively engage UN staff members at every level to send a message that Umoja is more than a new IT system. It is an essential tool for modernizing and streamlining the functioning of the UN. UN managers must embrace the opportunities that Umoja offers for meeting mandates better and more economically.

Transparency

Finally, Mr. Chairman, my delegation welcomes the fact that the General Assembly will once again have an opportunity to advance UN transparency by approving the public disclosure of audits of the UN Secretariat, as proposed by the head of OIOS. Transparency and accountability – not just to the 193 of us in this room, but to the public we represent – must be watchwords of the UN in the twenty-first century. As events around the world continue to demonstrate, when public institutions do not provide transparency, citizens lose trust. In this regard, my delegation was very pleased by the historic decision taken this summer by the Executive Boards of the New York based funds and programs to publicly disclose internal audit reports this year -a decision that removes one of the concerns previously raised here about the impact of any Secretariat decision on the funds and programs. That decision is something to be proud of, but also something to think about: while the funds and programs have acted, we in the Fifth Committee have stalled. This will be third time the General Assembly has considered the USG's proposal. And this issue, more than most, transcends the regional differences that sometimes bog us down. It is in the interest of every member state contributing to the UN to shine a public light on how the UN spend its funds. But it is equally – maybe even more so – in the interest of every member state served by the UN to shine that light and to raise the bar for performance. Let us come together to show the citizens whom we represent that we are here to serve their interests and increase transparency.

Closing

Mr. Chairman, these issues – personnel practices, budget levels, IT implementation, and audit disclosure – may seem unrelated and diverse, but they are not. Will we choose true reform, or window dressing? Fiscal restraint or business as usual? Sunshine or secrecy? The questions facing us are fundamentally similar: will we choose the easy, comfortable path of status quo, or take the difficult, ground-breaking path of progress towards a stronger, more effective and more relevant UN?

The people that the UN serves outside this room are depending on those of us inside this room to make the right choice, even though it is the harder choice. The citizens of Tunisia who benefited from the Department of Political Affairs' electoral assistance following the country's historic transition. The citizens in developing countries who benefit from the technical assistance on exports provided from the International Trade Center regarding export promotion. The work of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights to highlight abuses against individuals based on their sexual orientation. We owe it to them not to pause, or to let the UN slide slowly backwards. Instead, we should seize the opportunities before us in this session to advance the UN toward renewed excellence, transparency and accountability.

The United States delegation looks forward to working constructively with you and our colleagues to do just that.

Thank you.