

**70<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly, Fifth Committee**  
**Agenda item 143: Administration of Justice**  
**20 October 2015**

Introductory Statement by John Barkat, United Nations Ombudsman, on the report of the Secretary-General on the Activities of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services  
(A/70/151)

*Mr. Chairman,*  
*Distinguished Delegates,*

I am very pleased to have this opportunity to introduce the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services (UNOMS), covering the period from 1 January to 31 December 2014.

One of the core aspects of the Office's mandate is to provide staff members with easy access to informal conflict resolution.

To remain effective and productive, it is important for all who work for the United Nations to find collaborative approaches to resolve workplace concerns. These issues span a wide spectrum, but common to all is that if not resolved, they usually affect not only those directly involved, but also often the work at hand. Furthermore, when colleagues are able to work collaboratively and productively it improves motivation, enhances the functioning of systems, and advances the goals of the Organization.

The Office has observed that those who work in the deep field or in hazardous areas face unique and compelling challenges and are particularly desirous of our assistance. The Office of the UN Ombudsman and Mediation Services can help staff and managers build resilience in high stress situations and provide an important sounding board that reflects the Organization's support and care for its personnel.

*Distinguished Committee members,*

The report before you provides an update on the activities of the Office related to its mandate.

I am pleased to report that in 2014, UNOMS was able to provide assistance in more than 2,000 cases, a seven per cent increase from the previous year. Most of these cases - over 1,600- were received from Secretariat staff, including staff in peacekeeping missions. Mediation continues to be an important conflict resolution tool offered and it is encouraging that the number of staff who voluntarily sought mediation has increased.

Apart from this, the main trends in case demographics have remained the same, with about 80 per cent of cases emanating from offices away from UN headquarters in New York. The largest issue categories remain Job and Career (30%) and Evaluative Relationships (23%).

An increasing focus of the Office is to strengthen and develop skills that enable staff and managers to better prevent and manage workplace conflict, what we refer to as building “conflict competence.” During the period covered by this report, over 200 outreach activities were conducted by professional ombudsmen and mediators. Many included elements that help create a deeper understanding of workplace conflict or specific skills that can be applied in everyday situations, such as having a difficult conversation or receiving feedback.

During the reporting period, the Office continued its work to analyze the root causes of conflicts and provide feedback to the Organization. This includes engaging with the relevant departments to identify opportunities for organizational improvements, be it in policies, regulations, rules or processes. The report you have before you provides an update on some systemic issues that have been seen to often lie at the root of conflicts. These include abrasive behaviour and incivility; staff serving in dangerous environments; and how deficient or absent internal communications can be a contributing factor to conflict, particularly in times of change.

The Office continues to look for innovative approaches to expand access to informal conflict resolution services, with a particular emphasis on staff located in deep field offices, both in peacekeeping and in special political missions. The Office strives to creatively respond to a growing demand for conflict resolution services, including that in Africa and the Middle East; however, the challenge remains significant. Through the use of video-conferencing, WebEx meetings, Skype and telephone conversations, we have been able to address the demand somewhat with the technology available. Nevertheless, in-person services are considered essential and found to be more effective according to feedback provided to UNOMS by all categories of staff.

During 2014, the Organization continued to go through many changes, including in field missions. Whether termed as “downsizing”, “streamlining” or “reconfiguration” such processes tend to create uncertainty, confusion and stress, or even serious conflicts, which often leads to a higher demand for UNOMS services.

Whether in the field or at Headquarters, the Office of the United Nations Ombudsman and Mediation Services is committed to all staff and managers and to fostering harmonious working environments. I thank the Committee members for your continued support.