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**Agenda item 145: Administration of Justice**  
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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/71/157)

*Madam Chairperson,*

*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 2015.

In a complex organisation such as the United Nations, talented and diverse groups function together to produce rich and creative ideas. Yet, this same dynamic can also result in conflict and tension in the workplace. As previously stated by Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon “Just as the United Nations addresses conflicts around the world, so must we also pay close attention to resolving and managing conflicts within the Organization”. We all recognise the fact that conflict can be a valuable opportunity for change when handled constructively.

There are various options to resolve conflict. Informal processes help address the underlying causes of conflict. These processes help clarify interests and needs, resolve differences, restore working relationships and create a more harmonious workplace.

As we are aware, many United Nations staff work in high-stress environments where disruptions, extreme events, and threats to safety and health are too often the norm. Over 50 percent of Secretariat staff serve in field operations and for them, this is particularly relevant. These challenging circumstances are sometimes compounded by additional factors in the workplace such as interpersonal dynamics, conditions of service in field locations, and entrenched operational processes and practices.

Given this situation, it is not uncommon to find that issues can quickly escalate into conflicts and grievances. Our Office seeks to serve our staff globally to help prevent, manage and resolve conflicts and issues and to enhance staff resilience so that they are better able to focus on the important work at hand.

*Distinguished Delegates,*

As in previous years, our annual report provides an update on the activities of our Office related to its mandate. The Office provides three vital functions: dispute resolution services to all staff including managers; outreach and activities to promote greater conflict competence; and observations on systemic issues within the Organization.

During the reporting period, our Office was able to provide assistance in more than 2,500 cases, an increase of thirteen per cent over the previous year. Our Office continues to see a steady increase in mediation cases. A total of 78 mediation cases were recorded, which represents an increase of 22 per cent from the previous year. This increase, signals a heightened awareness of the benefits of mediation as a process which helps limit conflict escalation.

As you will find in the present report, during 2015, our Office continued to identify broad systemic issues, and engaged with relevant stakeholders to improve systems and facilitate the adoption of remedial measures. The systemic issues observed during the past year include administrative delays and lack of responsiveness; the continuing imperative of strengthening investigations; and planning and communication during mission downsizing.

In its role to promote conflict competence, our Office helps develop the skills that equip staff at all levels of the organization to manage conflicts constructively. In addition to playing a preventative role, promoting conflict competence can enhance personal resilience. Thus, we are pleased to report that during 2015, our Office conducted over 360 outreach activities around the world, including 146 skill-building workshops, training activities and information sessions, which sought to strengthen and support UN staff.

*Distinguished Delegates,*

One of the core aspects of our Office's mandate is to provide staff members with easy access to informal conflict resolution, especially for those based in peacekeeping and special political missions. In-person intervention provides the human element essential for building trust and confidence in conflict resolution processes. This is especially applicable when highly sensitive issues are involved, which is mostly the case in stressful field environments. The Office has achieved a marked degree of success as reflected in the demand for its services. On an average, over the last five years, 52% of the total cases handled, originated from field based staff. As described in the report, this could be partly attributed to our efforts to implement measures to enhance access.

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In a large and complex organization like the United Nations, workplace conflict can easily eclipse the important work at hand. However, the hallmark of great organizations and workplaces is that they continually

learn from their experience and improve their policies, processes and practices. And, for such organizations, valuing and respecting those who dedicate their lives to its service, should be a key priority for all staff and managers. Respect can be engendered by small acts, but it can have a lasting impact.

Our Office seeks to help create a more respectful, collaborative and harmonious workplace within the Organization and to help transform the way it does business so that it can, in turn, be a more effective force for good in the world. I would like to thank both the General Assembly and Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon for their unwavering support to further these goals.

Thank you.