

UN Ethics Office
Statement by Ms. Elia Yi Armstrong, Director,
before the Fifth Committee
13 November 2019

Mr. Chairperson,
Distinguished Members of the Committee,

I have the honor to present the latest Report of the Secretary-General on the *Activities of the Ethics Office* from 1 January to 31 December 2018. The report additionally includes information on the activities of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (EPUN) as requested by the General Assembly in resolution 63/250 on “Human resources management”.

As an independent office, the UN Ethics Office continues to assist the Secretary-General to enhance the Organization’s culture of ethics, transparency and accountability.

In 2018, the Office received 1,966 requests for services, which is a significant increase from 1,490 in 2017. The Office also provided advice, upon request, on due diligence, reputational risk management and best practices in corporate compliance programmes.

The Ethics Office managed the Financial Disclosure Programme, which externally reviewed 5,937 confidential disclosure statements for the 2018 cycle and rolled out a new online platform. A final total of 119 or 78.3% of 142 senior officials participated in the 2018 Secretary-General’s Voluntary Public Disclosure Initiative.

For outreach, among other activities, the Ethics Office facilitated the 2018 Secretariat’s Leadership Dialogue on “*Speaking up: when does it become whistleblowing?*”. The 2018 Dialogue had around 31,7000 participants, the largest number since its launch in 2013

In 2018, the Ethics Office received 136 requests about the strengthened policy on protection against retaliation for reporting wrongdoing and cooperating with audits and investigations, which represent a 48 per cent increase from 2017. The Office responded to seven referrals from the Office of Internal Oversight Services for prevention of retaliation, conducted 38 preliminary reviews with six prima facie retaliation case determinations, and found four cases of retaliation after investigation.

The Ethics Office also continued to support the Secretariat and various United Nations entities in reviewing relevant policy provisions. In 2018, I chaired 10 meetings of the Ethics Panel of the United Nations (EPUN) and co-chaired with the Ethics Office of the World Food Programme the tenth meeting of the Ethics Network of Multilateral Organizations, hosted by the Secretariat.

Mr. Chair and Distinguished Committee Members,

As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 71/263, the Secretary-General had proposed several measures for strengthening the independence of the Ethics Office in his 2016-17 report (A/73/89, para 94). You may recall that they included: 1) submitting the annual report of the Ethics Office to the Secretary-General for transmittal, as received, to the General Assembly; 2) adding a reporting line to the Independent Audit Advisory Committee for guidance with respect to the Office's workplans and performance evaluation of the Head of the Office; 3) raising the rank of the Head of the Ethics Office from the Director (D-2) level to the level of Assistant-Secretary-General (starting with the next Head of the Office); 4) introducing term limits for the Head of the Office to one five-year term with the possibility of renewal for one additional term; 5) ensuring security of tenure for the Head of the Office by allowing termination of appointment only for cases of serious misconduct or unsatisfactory performance; and 6) restricting re-employment for the Head of the Office with no possibility of other employment within the Secretariat.

In response to the ACABQ's recommendation in its report 73/18, the 2018 Secretary-General's Report succinctly highlighted the rationale for the independence measures. The extent to which the Ethics Office is independent, and seen to be independent from the Organization's management, builds trust and confidence among staff. This trust is important to the advisory function in preventing and managing conflict-of-interest risks, for the protection of the Organization's reputation. The independence also assures staff that the Ethics Office reviews claims of protection against retaliation, free from political and hierarchical pressure, influence or interference. The importance of the independence of the ethics functions was well noted in the 2010 report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU/REP/2010/3) and in its review of whistle-blower-policies and practices in the United Nations system organizations (JIU/REP/2018/4). Many good practices are already in place among members of the EPUN.

We look forward to answering any questions that you may have as well as continuing this important discussion.