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Before: Judge Agnieszka Klonowiecka-Milart

Registry: Nairobi

Registrar: Abena Kwakye-Berko

MPAIRWE

v.

SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

JUDGMENT

Counsel for the Applicant:

Self-represented

Counsel for the Respondent:

Matthias Schuster, AAS/ALD/OHR Susan Maddox, AAS/ALD/OHR

Introduction

1. The Applicant is a former Security Officer at the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS).

2. In his application filed on 17 August 2018, he contests the decision communicated to him by the Officer-in-Charge, Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM), on 3 August 2018, to impose on him the disciplinary measure of separation from service with compensation in lieu of notice and with termination indemnity, in accordance with staff rule 10.2(a)(viii), for knowingly submitting false information in his job application that he did not have a relative working for a public international organization while his brother was working at the United Nations at the time.

3. The Respondent filed a reply to the application on 17 September 2018.

4. The Tribunal heard the case on 12 and 13 June 2019 during which the Applicant and his brother testified.

Facts

5. The Applicant joined the Organization on 30 June 2007 when he was selected as an FS-4 Security Officer at the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). In November 2011, he applied for a membership on a roster for Security Officers at the FS-5 level. Subsequently, the Applicant was selected as a Security Officer at the FS-5 level at UNMISS which position he held until his separation from service on 8 August 2018.¹

6. From June 2004 till 2007 the Applicant had served at the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL). Parallel, from November 2004 to present, the Applicant's brother, Mr. Francis Tumusiime-Baraba, has served as a staff member of the Organization. In November 2004, he commenced service with the United Nations

¹ Reply, para. 6.

Mission in Liberia (UNMIL); in January 2009, he moved to the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); since March 2014, he has served as Chief Procurement Officer with the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA).²

7. Between December 2006 and January 2007 when applying to UNMIS ³, and, subsequently, 17 times between 2011 and 29 January 2018, the Applicant submitted Personal History Profiles (PHPs) for job openings at the Security Sector in the United Nations. In these PHPs he answered in the negative to the question: "Are any of your relatives employed by the United Nations Secretariat?"⁴ His brother, on the other hand, disclosed the Applicant's employment with the United Nations in his PHPs and the financial disclosure documents.⁵

8. On 16 March 2017, Ms. Chhaya Kapilashrami, Director, Department of Field Support, Field Personnel Division (FPD) wrote a note to Ms. Mercedes Gervilla, Conduct and Discipline Unit, referring a case of possible misrepresentation and non-disclosure of family relationship relating to the Applicant and his brother. Ms. Kapilashrami indicated that FPD became aware of the issue when the United Nations Support Office in Somalia (UNSOS) contacted the Quality Assurance Unit in connection with a recruitment process for the post of P-4 Contract Management Officer in UNSOS.⁶

9. An investigation by UNMISS Special Investigations Unit (SIU) commenced in April 2017.⁷ The Applicant was interviewed on 5 June 2017.⁸ As part of the investigation, correspondence was exchanged with Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba between 20 June and 20 July 2017.⁹ On 30 June 2017, Mr. O'Malley of the SIU submitted his Investigation Report to the Officer-in-Charge of UNMISS/SIU in which he concluded

² Reply, para. 7 and annex 2 to the reply.

³ Reply, annex 2.

⁴ Reply, annex 3.

⁵ Reply, annex 2, from page 68 onwards.

⁶ Reply, annex 2 at page 25.

⁷ Ibid., at page 12.

⁸ Ibid., at page 35.

⁹ Ibid., at pages 78-80.

that the Applicant had been forthright in his admissions that he did not indicate that his brother was employed by the Organization in his PHP in violation of United Nations regulations.

10. Following further transmittals between UNMISS and the Department of Field Support¹⁰, on 12 March 2018, Ms. Lisa Buttenheim, Assistant Secretary-General for Field Support (ASG/DFS), sent a memorandum to Ms. Martha Helena Lopez, Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management (ASG/OHRM), transmitting the UNMISS/SIU Investigation Report and recommending that the Applicant be subject to disciplinary action.¹¹

11. On 15 May 2018, Mr. Mathew Sanidas, Chief, Human Resources Policy Services, OHRM, transmitted the allegations of misconduct to the Applicant for his comments.¹² The allegations concerned the Applicant's knowingly submitting in his job applications, between December 2006 and January 2007, false information that he did not have a relative working for a public international organization while his brother was working at the United Nations at the material time. The Applicant submitted his responses to the allegations on 1 June 2018.¹³

12. By letter dated 3 August 2018, the Officer-in-Charge, OHRM informed the Applicant that it had been decided to impose on him the disciplinary measure of separation from service with compensation in lieu of notice and with termination indemnity, in accordance with staff rule 10.2(a)(viii).¹⁴

Evidence adduced before the Tribunal

13. At the request of the Applicant, the Tribunal heard testimony from him and his brother.

14. The Applicant testified that he recalled giving a statement to the SIU

¹⁰ Ibid., pages 11, 12 and 14.

¹¹ Application – Annex D.

¹² Reply – Annex 4.

¹³ Reply – Annex 6.

¹⁴ Reply – Annex 7.

investigator and confirmed that on this occasion he had spoken the truth. He came into employment with the Organization before his brother. He joined the SCSL in June 2004, while Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba joined UNMIL in November 2004. At the time when he joined SCSL, Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba was not working with any United Nations Organization as his contract with UNESCO had expired.

15. In turn, Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba was dishonest in his PHP when he applied for UNMIL in October 2004. He was also dishonest when he indicated that he had come to know that the Applicant was employed by the United Nations only on 30 June 2014, whereas it had been Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba who had assisted him to fill in the check-in documents for the SCSL in May 2004. Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba should have indicated him in his PHP in November 2004 rather than 10 years later in 2014.

16. The Applicant admitted having known that his brother got the employment in the United Nations sometime in November 2004. He did not know whether on this occasion his brother listed him in the PHP or not. There was a conflict between them and breakdown of the communication that happened approximately at the same time. From 2005 through around 2009 he, however, knew the whereabouts of his brother through family members, two cousins and an uncle, who would go between them in attempts at reconciliation. Thus, he knew that his brother worked in UNMIL and then in MONUSCO. As of 2009, because of blackmail and denunciation in which his brother had engaged against him, there was no more prospect of reconciliation and he stopped getting information about his brother. This lack of information continued until the time when he was interviewed by the SIU. He, nevertheless knew that MONUSCO was ongoing and had no indication that his brother would have left the Organization.

17. The Applicant testified that in filling out the PHP in 2007 he understood the question about relatives in employment of the United Nations. He did not indicate his brother on his PHP for three reasons: because he had joined the Organization before his brother; because of a family conflict between them; and because he did not consider it important. He was not aware of the Organization's policy in this respect;

he, however, did not consider it important given that he and his brother were not working in the same mission or department and neither of them supervised the other. The reasons for not disclosing that his brother's employment by the Organization in his subsequent applications were just as the same. He did not recall the wording of the formula that was used on the Inspira portal for the applicants to attest for the veracity of data that they provided.

18. Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba testified that indeed he had had no contact with the Applicant since 2004. He did not remember helping him fill out the job application in 2004; he however knew that the Applicant secured employment at SCSL. He himself did not indicate that he had a brother employed by the United Nations in 2004 because SCSL was not part of the United Nations Common System. Thereafter, nevertheless, he always disclosed his relationship with the Applicant in all relevant documents. His knowledge about the Applicant's employment with UNMIS was from home, where he went for his Rest and Recuperation, from their siblings and other relatives had tried to mediate between him and the Applicant. Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba said "we were from the same place; it was impossible for me not to know".

19. It was agreed that after the hearing the parties would file additional documents. Specifically, the Respondent was to provide information about the formula applied on the United Nations job applications portal for the purpose of attesting the veracity of the provided data. The Applicant wished to append comments on the case that he provided orally in the hearing. The Applicant and Respondent filed these documents on 19 and 20 June respectively.¹⁵ The documents submitted by the Respondent show that the Galaxy online system required an applicant to certify—by way of clicking on a check-box—that "all my replies are true, complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief. I understand that

¹⁵ The Applicant also filed questions that he had asked Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba during the hearing, a Ugandan certificate of customary marriage for himself and his wife. These, apart from going beyond the agreed scope of the filings, were found repetitious or otherwise irrelevant.

any false statements or the withholding of any relevant information may provide grounds for the withdrawal of any offer of appointment or, if an appointment has been accepted, for its immediate cancellation or termination".¹⁶ The Inspira online system requires an applicant to certify—by way of clicking "ok" in a pop-up window—that "all of the statements in this application are true, complete and made in good faith. I understand that falsifying or intentionally withholding information will be grounds for rejection of my application or the withdrawal of any offer of appointment or, if an appointment has been accepted, for its immediate cancellation or termination".¹⁷

Applicant's case

20. The obligation to disclose their relationship lay on his brother who applied to the United Nations when he had already been in the system, that is with the SCSL. Had the Organization acted diligently and checked the data, his brother would not have been employed and the issue would not have arisen. The policy or rules should indicate clearly who should disclose whom. It is also unclear whether the obligation arises only at the initial employment or continues throughout the following years.

21. Not disclosing his relationship with Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba in his PHP was not an intentional act. It was a total oversight and, as he had told the investigator, he takes total responsibility and feels remorseful for doing so.

22. When he read the SIU Investigation Report, he felt that it was unfair how his brother was exonerated yet he was separated.

23. The Applicant prays the Tribunal to order that he be given a lesser punishment, that he be compensated for the period when he was unfairly separated from service and that he be reinstated to his job considering that he had never had any previous misconduct.

¹⁶ Annex R/8, Screenshot of certification required in the Galaxy System obtained from the Office of Information and Communications Technology.

¹⁷ Annex R/9, Inspira Manual for Applicants (2012), p. 92.

Respondent's Case

24. The facts were established by clear and convincing evidence.

a. The Applicant does not deny the fact that between December 2006 and January 2007, he knowingly stated in his job application that he did not have a relative working for a public international organization, even though he was aware that his brother was working for the United Nations at the time. In his application, the Applicant again explicitly accepts the responsibility for his conduct.

b. The Applicant's contention relating to a history of personal conflicts between him and his brother is not relevant because it does not change the facts that Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba is his brother and that the Applicant failed to disclose his brother's employment with the United Nations.

c. The Applicant's contention that his conduct was not intentional is contradicted by the fact that he certified the truthfulness of the information he submitted in his PHP.

d. Whether the Applicant served in the same duty station as his brother or whether the Applicant benefitted from the misrepresentation are not relevant. Contrary to his contention, the Applicant in fact benefited from his non-disclosure. The former staff rule 104.10(a) applicable at the time of his conduct required that appointment should be granted to a brother of an existing staff member only if another person equally well qualified cannot be recruited. Therefore, if the Applicant had disclosed his brother's employment with the United Nations, his application would have been subject to further scrutiny to determine if another person equally well qualified could not be recruited.

e. In the application, the Applicant asserts that he joined the United Nations before his brother by joining the SCSL, and that his brother knew

about this, and did not disclose the Applicant's employment with the SCSL to the United Nations. Specifically, the Applicant alleges that, in May 2004, the Applicant's brother became aware of the Applicant's employment with the SCSL and knowingly submitted false information that he had no relative employed by the United Nations in his job application with UNMIL submitted in October 2004.

f. The Applicant's contentions relating to who joined the Organization first are irrelevant. As a matter of fact, the SIU undertook a preliminary investigation into Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba's conduct, which resulted in a conclusion that Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba has truthfully and consistently disclosed the Applicant's employment with the United Nations in his PHPs and financial disclosure documents. In addition, as a general rule, the Applicant cannot compel the Organization to undertake an investigation into Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba's conduct.

g. The Applicant's argument that he joined the United Nations before Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba is not correct because the Applicant's employment with the SCSL did not constitute employment with the United Nations. The SCSL was established based on a treaty between the United Nations and the Government of Sierra Leone in accordance with Security Council resolution 1315 (2000) of 14 August 2000. Under the terms and conditions of the Agreement, only the Registrar of the SCSL was a staff member of the United Nations Secretariat (UNS) staff members. Contrary to the Applicant's contention, Mr. Tumusiime-Baraba would not have been under an obligation to disclose the Applicant's employment with the SCSL in response to a question asking if he had a relative employed by the UNS.

h. The evidence on the record indicates that the Applicant knew the nature of his position at the SCSL. The Applicant stated in his PHP of 2007 that his position at the SCSL was not "a position within the UN Common

System", and that he had been "never employed" within the United Nations Common System.

25. The Applicant's actions amounted to serious misconduct.

a. Through his conduct, the Applicant violated staff regulation 1.2(b) and his conduct amounted to misconduct under Chapter X of the Staff Rules. Knowing submission of false information in a PHP exhibits a serious lapse of integrity, and displays dishonesty.

b. The jurisprudence regarding the expected conduct of international civil servants in so far as integrity is concerned when submitting documents and completing PHPs is well settled as held by the United Nations Appeals Tribunal (UNAT/the Appeals Tribunal) in *Rajan* 2017-UNAT-781.

26. The disciplinary sanction is proportionate to the offence.

a. The Tribunal should dismiss the Applicant's request to replace the sanction with a "lesser punishment". The disciplinary sanction imposed on the Applicant is in line with the past practice in comparable disciplinary cases. The sanction in this case is a reasonable exercise of the Administration's broad discretion in disciplinary matters; a discretion which should not be lightly interfered with.

b. The Organization has consistently applied a "zero-tolerance" policy on false certifications/misrepresentations in job applications. This policy has been recognized and affirmed by the well-established jurisprudence of the Tribunals.

c. The sanction imposed on the Applicant took into account the specific aggravating and mitigating factors. As a mitigating circumstance, it was considered that the Applicant made an early admission of the facts during the investigation and he expressed remorse and apologized for his conduct. With respect to an aggravating factor, it was considered that the Applicant repeated his misrepresentation in all PHPs that he submitted since 2007.

d. The Applicant's personal financial obligations towards the United Nations Federal Credit Union (UNFCU) or his family as stated in his 1 June 2018 response to the allegations of misconduct are not relevant to the facts of this case, and thus they are not considered as mitigating circumstances. Contrary to the Applicant's contention in the application, having no previous disciplinary record is not a mitigating factor as it is the duty of all staff members to conduct themselves in compliance with the standards and obligations expected of them as international civil servants.

27. The Applicant's fairness rights were respected throughout the process.

a. The Applicant was interviewed by the SIU and asked about his submission of the 2007 PHP which formed the factual basis in the allegations of misconduct. He signed the interview statement to the SIU, indicating that it was a true and accurate record. In the allegations memorandum, dated 15 May 2018, the Applicant was informed of his right to seek the assistance of counsel and was given the opportunity to comment on the allegations. The Applicant provided comments on the allegations of misconduct, which were duly considered. During the investigation, the Applicant was not asked about the numerous subsequent times he submitted false information in his PHPs. Therefore, the Applicant's subsequent PHPs did not constitute part of the allegations of misconduct.

b. The Applicant was also afforded an opportunity to comment on the aggravating factor in this case, namely, the Applicant's repeated misrepresentation in the subsequent PHPs. The allegations memorandum dated 15 May 2018 included information concerning the numerous times when the Applicant submitted false information in his PHPs. In his comments on the allegations and in his Application, the Applicant indeed accepted the responsibility for his continued failure to disclose his brother's employment with the United Nations since 2007. In the application, the Applicant provided no basis for his contention that he was not given "fair hearing and judgment to the said allegations".

28. The decision to impose the disciplinary measures on the Applicant based on clear and convincing evidence was taken in compliance with applicable legal norms. The question of rescission therefore does not arise. Nor does the issue of moral damages. However, should the Tribunal decide not to dismiss the Application, the Respondent requests the opportunity to make additional submissions on any requested compensation.

Considerations

Whether facts were established by clear and convincing evidence

29. The Applicant consistently, throughout the proceedings, admitted the fact that sometime between December 2006 and January 2007, he had stated in his job application that he had no relative working for a public international organization, even though he was aware that at the time his brother was working for the United Nations. As such, the fact that the Applicant failed to disclose relevant information when he should have, is essentially not in dispute.

30. Whereas the Applicant insists to calls his deed an "oversight", it is impossible to accept. On the Applicant's testimony alone it is clear that in 2007 he did not commit a mistake of fact, or forgot, that he had a brother who was employed by the United Nations. The Applicant supplies different justification for omitting this information in his PHPs, none of which is exonerating. No matter the justification, it is, nevertheless, obvious, that not disclosing his brother's employment with the United Nations was the Applicant's decision.

31. Whereas the Applicant testified that as of 2009 he had no information of his

brother's whereabouts, he also had no basis to assume that his brother's employment with the United Nations ceased. By invoking the same justifications for not disclosing his brother's employment while not verifying the state of facts, the Applicant demonstrated, at minimum, indifference regarding the veracity of his submissions.

Whether the facts amount to misconduct

32. The Appeals Tribunal held in *Ainte* that when submitting an application for an appointment it is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that his application did not contain any inaccuracies and the Organization is under no obligation to prove that a candidate intended to mislead the Organization in his or her answers to the questions of the applications forms.¹⁸ Echoing the same, in *Rajan* the Appeals Tribunal held that the Organization's rules of disclosure set out in the various statutory and contractual provisions provide that staff members shall be responsible on appointment for supplying the Secretary-General with whatever information may be required for the purpose of determining their status under the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules or of completing administrative arrangements in connection with their appointments. staff rule 1.5, introduced by ST/SGB/2009/7 (Staff Regulations of the United Nations and provisional Staff Rules), provides that staff members shall be held personally accountable for the accuracy and completeness of the information they provide. The Appeals Tribunal added that the certification in paragraph 33 of the P.11 form (one in use at the time material for the appeals Tribunal Judgment) required the staff member to certify the truth, completeness and correctness of the information and warrants that any misrepresentation or material omission made on the form renders the staff member liable to termination or dismissal. The use of the general word "any" is a clear indication in the language that all false statements will be liable to the sanction of dismissal, be they intentional or negligent.¹⁹ A strict rule in relation to probity and honesty in the disclosure of recruitment information is justified by the unusual and often remote process by which international recruitment

¹⁸ Ainte 2013-UNAT-388, para. 28.

¹⁹ Rajan 2017-UNAT-781 at para. 42.

occurs within the Organization.²⁰ As such, a failure by a staff member to comply with his or her disclosure of information obligations under the Charter of the United Nations, the Staff Regulations and Rules or other relevant administrative issuances, is undeniably misconduct.²¹

33. Staff regulation 1.2(b) makes it clear that, as a "core value" of the Organization, staff members shall uphold the highest standards of integrity. The Appeals Tribunal indicated that this concept includes, but is not limited to, probity, impartiality, fairness, honesty and truthfulness in all matters affecting their work and status. The failure to reply correctly to a prominent and very relevant question in an application form amounts to a false answer from which dishonesty normally may be inferred. Hence, a false answer in an application form is prima facie proof of dishonesty, shifting the evidentiary burden to the maker of the false statement to adduce sufficient evidence of innocence.²²

34. This Tribunal notes that, although staff rule 1.5, introduced by ST/SGB/2009/7, came into force after the application covered by the allegations of misconduct, the same norm had been expressed at the relevant time in relation to the staff of the United Nations Secretariat. Specifically, the staff rules applicable to persons appointed under the 300-series regime, such as would have prevalently made up the personnel of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) where the Applicant aspired in 2007, provided in rule 304.3:

a. Staff members shall be responsible on appointment for supplying the Secretary-General with whatever information may be required for the purpose of determining their status under the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules or of completing administrative arrangements in connection with their appointments. Specifically, this requirement shall include information on nationality, passport and visa, marital status, dependency status and designation of beneficiary, and information concerning any financial interest the staff member may hold in any

²⁰ Ibid., at para. 36.

²¹ Ibid., at para.. 37.

²² Ibid., at para. 38.

business concern with which he or she may have to deal as a staff member.

b. Staff members shall be responsible for promptly notifying the Secretary-General, in writing, of any subsequent changes affecting their status under the Staff Regulations or Staff Rules. ²³

35. Similar language was employed by staff rule 104.4 applicable to staff on 100series appointments.²⁴

36. Moreover, notwithstanding whether an applicant for a vacant position with the United Nations would have been already employed by it – and thus subject to Staff Regulations and Rules - or only applying for the first time, the mode of receiving applications provided at all times that it was required to state the facts truthfully under the sanction of loss of employment.²⁵

37. As such, contrary to a proposition advanced by the Applicant before the Tribunal that it was upon the Organization to check the accuracy of the data supplied in the applications, the obligation rested with the Applicant. The Applicant's conduct, at all relevant times, was in breach of the obligation to provide accurate information for the purpose of determining his status.

38. The issues concerned eligibility for appointment. With this respect, staff rule 304.6 (Family relationships) applicable to staff on 300-series appointments provided:

(a) Except when another person equally qualified cannot be recruited, appointment shall not normally be granted to a person who bears any of the following relationships to a staff member: father, mother, son, daughter, brother or sister.²⁶

The same norm was expressed by staff rule 104.10(a) applicable to staff on 100-series

 $^{^{23}}$ ST/SGB/2007/3 (Staff Rules 301.1 to 312.6 governing appointments for service of a limited duration).

²⁴ ST/SGB/2002/1 (Staff Rules and Staff Regulations of the United Nations and Staff Rules 100.1 to 112.8).

²⁵ Annexes R/8 and R/9.

²⁶ ST/SGB/2007/3.

appointments.²⁷

39. Contrary to the Applicant's assertion that his misrepresentation was not important, it concerned a circumstance material for the Applicant's relationship with the Organization: as rightly pointed out by the Respondent, the Applicant benefited from the non-disclosure by unduly elevating his chances for appointment.

40. Since it was established that the Applicant had acted intentionally, he was also in breach of staff regulation 1.2(b) which required, as a "core value" of the Organization, that staff members uphold the highest standards of integrity. The concept of integrity includes, but is not limited to, probity, impartiality, fairness, honesty and truthfulness in all matters affecting their work and status. The Applicant's conduct went against the requirement of honesty and truthfulness. Whether the Applicant's brother complied with the obligation, a circumstance on which the Applicant was heavily focused despite the Tribunal's indication about the subject of the proceedings— is immaterial for the Applicant's case.

41. Based on the aforesaid, the Tribunal concludes that misconduct has been properly established.

Proportionality of sanction

42. As determined by staff rule 10.3(b) "[a]ny disciplinary measure imposed on a staff member shall be proportionate to the nature and gravity of his or her misconduct". Furthermore, the Appeals Tribunal, indicated that other factors to be considered in assessing the proportionality of a sanction include the length of service, the disciplinary record of the employee, the attitude of the employee and his past conduct, the context of the violation and employer consistency.²⁸

43. The gravity of the misconduct is related to the subjective element, being a faulty state of mind, and to the objective dangerousness of the conduct, including the

²⁷ ST/SGB/2002/1.

²⁸ Rajan 2017-UNAT-781 at para. 48.

rank of the norm breached, the degree of the breach and any negative consequences entailed by it. The faulty state of mind in the present case manifested itself in an intentional omission signifying dishonesty. As held by the Appeals Tribunal, as a general rule, any form of dishonest conduct compromises the necessary relationship of trust between employer and employee and will generally warrant dismissal.²⁹ The Tribunal finds, moreover that all the mitigating and aggravating circumstances were properly identified by the Respondent. The Tribunal finds no basis for intervening with the sanction.

CONCLUSION

44. The application is dismissed.

(Signed)

Judge Agnieszka Klonowiecka-Milart Dated this 8th day of July 2019

Entered in the Register on this this 8th day of July 2019

(Signed)

Abena Kwakye-Berko, Registrar, Nairobi

²⁹ *Rajan* 2017-UNAT-781 at para. 38; see also *Nourain* 2013-UNST-362 at para. 25.