



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/52/661
11 November 1997
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: FRENCH

Fifty-second session
Agenda item 157

UNITED NATIONS REFORM: MEASURES AND PROPOSALS

Letter dated 11 November 1997 from the Permanent Representative
of Luxembourg to the United Nations addressed to the
Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit to you herewith a summary of the statements made in informal consultations by Luxembourg, on behalf of the European Union, concerning the United Nations reform (see annex).

I should be grateful if you would have the text of this letter and its annex issued as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 157.

(Signed) Jean-Louis WOLZFELD
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

ANNEX

Summary of the statements made in informal consultations by
Luxembourg, on behalf of the European Union, concerning
United Nations reform

Part concerning proposed actions

The European Union is pleased that the General Assembly has approved the measures contained in the Secretary-General's reform programme (A/51/950).

We believe that the message received and the choices made by the Secretary-General, the main focuses of work which he proposes and the impetus he is providing in this programme constitute a package which is both ambitious and realistic and which, when implemented, will help bring about a far-reaching change in the way the United Nations operates and in the way it is organized. The purpose of the proposed programme is to make our Organization a more efficient and effective instrument in the service of the international community.

The measures outlined in the document presented to us come under the authority of the Secretary-General under Article 97 of the Charter, which confers on the Secretary-General responsibility for organizing the Secretariat services. These measures - some of which have already been implemented - are designed to enhance the coherence and efficiency of our Organization's action. They have the approval of the European Union.

As the Secretary-General points out in his report, future success hinges on the United Nations ability to achieve a unity of purpose among its diverse departments, funds and programmes, enabling it to act coherently and deploy its resources strategically.

We also recognize that the package of proposed measures reflects a desire to balance the goal of improving the operation of the system with the need to take into account the various sensitivities which coexist within the General Assembly, and that these measures constitute a reasonable compromise in the best interest of our Organization.

While fully supporting the measures presented by the Secretary-General, the European Union wishes to submit its comments on a number of measures concerning sectors of United Nations activity that it considers to be particularly important.

Action 6. Disarmament and regulation of armaments (para. 125)

The European Union welcomes the increased importance given to the area of disarmament. It can support the creation of a Department for Disarmament and Arms Regulation as proposed in the original document (A/51/950). The Union would like the United Nations to continue playing its full role in assisting and supporting the efforts of Member States and would like the role of Geneva as the centre of negotiations and analysis to be confirmed.

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Action 7. Reform of the Secretariat (para. 142)

The European Union welcomes the merging of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis and the Department for Development Support and Management Services into a new consolidated Department of Economic and Social Affairs and will support the translation thereof into budgetary terms.

It hopes that the creation within the new Department of a substantive Economic and Social Council secretariat will result in greater administrative support for the latter and, consequently, in an improvement in its performance. In this context we welcome the decision to create within the context of the secretariat an identifiable inter-agency affairs unit which will service the Administrative Committee on Coordination.

The European Union awaits with interest the outcome of the review of macroeconomic activities. The latter should lead to rationalization of the work of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs while ensuring respect for the relevant outcomes of the major international conferences.

Action 8. Drug control, crime prevention and combating international terrorism (para. 145)

The European Union welcomes the increased importance attached to combating crime, drugs and terrorism, as reflected in the creation of a centre to handle United Nations activities in these areas. This will produce considerable synergies between the crime prevention and drug control sectors.

The European Union believes, however, that the multidisciplinary nature of United Nations drug control policy must be preserved. It therefore welcomes the fact that the balance in the work of the United Nations Drug Control Programme between combating drug trafficking and other components of drug control, including activities aimed at prevention, rehabilitation and the reduction of supply through alternative development programmes, will be maintained.

Action 9. Development cooperation (para. 157)

The European Union fully supports the proposed reforms which represent an important step towards improved coordination of United Nations operational activities at Headquarters and in the field, and towards increased efficiency and productivity in the system.

The European Union is convinced that the United Nations Development Group can play a vital role in rationalizing and enhancing the impact of the operational activities for development of the United Nations system. Full involvement of the secretariats of the various funds and programmes in the operations of the Development Group is imperative in this context.

Action 13. Humanitarian affairs: role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the consolidated appeal process (para. 191)

The European Union generally agrees with the Secretary-General's proposals in this area. It will work to ensure that they are translated into budgetary terms and, more particularly, that they are financed entirely from the regular budget:

(a) The European Union believes that the new Coordinator should be designated as soon as possible so that he/she can have a say in the current restructuring process;

(b) The European Union supports a return to the core functions identified in General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991. The Coordinator will have to devote all his/her efforts to the three key goals identified by the Secretary-General, namely: policy development, advocacy of humanitarian issues with the main political organs and, lastly, coordination of humanitarian response;

(c) It seems essential that, henceforth, the Office of the Emergency Relief Coordinator should not undertake emergency field activities. The Union can therefore support the redistribution of some of the functions of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs within the system. It wishes to emphasize, however, that the humanitarian aspect of demining activities will have to be given due consideration when these activities are assigned to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. The question as to which organ will be given responsibility for the implementation of Security Council resolution 986 (1995) will also have to be clarified;

(d) The relationship between the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the Steering Committee and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs will have to be clarified;

(e) The European Union can support further enhancement of the consolidated appeal process. It welcomes the fact that appeals for rehabilitation and reconstruction will be included in this process;

(f) The European Union believes that the Coordinator should continue to have some room for manoeuvre in this area. The designation of a lead agency is just one of several possible options for field coordination in complex emergencies.

The viability, indeed the success, of the new arrangement will depend largely on such factors as the profile and qualifications of the Emergency Relief Coordinator; the competence of his/her colleagues, in particular, the secondment of staff by the various humanitarian agencies; a logical distribution of tasks; clear lines of responsibility; and, lastly, a division of labour between Geneva and New York which takes proper account of the specific characteristics of each of these two headquarters cities - a division of labour to which the Union attaches importance.

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Action 15. Coordination with other United Nations programmes (para. 201)

The European Union welcomes the fact that the programme recalls that human rights are inherent to democratization, the promotion of peace, economic security and social equity:

(a) The European Union understands that the assessment of the work of the Executive Committees, to be made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, should help to reinforce a horizontal approach to human rights. Ever since the post of High Commissioner was created, it has felt that the High Commissioner, who is "the United Nations official with principal responsibility for United Nations human rights activities", should be able to contribute constructively to all United Nations activities, inter alia, those relating to peace, security and peacekeeping, so that human rights are effectively mainstreamed;

(b) The European Union fully supports efforts to increase complementarity among the technical assistance activities carried out by different United Nations entities in the area of human rights. In this context, particular attention will also have to be paid to resource mobilization to ensure that the technical assistance provided by the Office of the High Commissioner plays an increasingly important role;

(c) The European Union welcomes the Secretary-General's decision to upgrade and strengthen the representation of the High Commissioner's office at Headquarters, which will help to ensure that the High Commissioner's mandate is implemented fully. In general, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and indeed the High Commissioner's Office, must be given the staff and budgetary resources needed to ensure the effective promotion and protection of human rights.

Action 17. Civil society (para. 216)

The European Union welcomes the increased importance attached to the involvement of civil society in the work of the United Nations:

(a) The European Union generally favours closer cooperation with non-governmental organizations and representatives of civil society;

(b) The European Union welcomes the decision to designate a non-governmental liaison officer within each department. It hopes that the necessary conditions will be created to enable the liaison officers to perform their role effectively.

The decision to establish a "business liaison service" seems an appropriate way of reflecting the increasingly important role of the private sector in United Nations activities.
