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Report of the First Meeting of the Committee of Experts on Public Administration

Summary

The Committee of Experts on Public Administration met at the United Nations Headquarters from 22 to 26 July 2002. The Committee, established by the Economic and Social Council through Resolution 2001/45 of 20 December 2001, consists of 24 experts appointed in their personal capacity.

In accordance with Economic and Social Council Decision 2002/206, the Committee discussed: (a) enhancing the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration, (b) basic data on the public sector, and (c) United Nations activities on public administration.

The Committee identified six priority areas in which Member States can build capacity to implement the Millennium Declaration:

- (a) The public sector must develop a strategy to recruit and retain its fair share of the best talent;
- (b) Public sector institutions must become strategic and strong “learning organizations” in a globalized and knowledge-based economy;
- (c) Public sector institutions should harness the power of information and communication technologies in support of *innovation* and *good governance*;
- (d) Governments should align financial and management capacities to ensure the optimal mobilization and use of resources;

(e) Governments should design and implement effective combinations of decentralization and centralization policies and programmes in order to promote people-centred development; and

(f) Capacity-building efforts can be assisted by the development of evidence-based international data.

Given the special needs of Africa, the Committee *recommended a special focus in terms of support, technical and professional assistance* in Africa. The work of the United Nations should take into account the partnership concept advocated by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

The Committee reviewed the United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance and made recommendations on future directions in the following areas: enabling advocacy; developing analytical and policy tools; sharing experiences; coordinating development assistance in public administration; building a common understanding; and providing technical assistance in developing human resources, building institutions and ensuring technological adequacy and connectivity.

The Committee welcomed the first issue of the World Public Sector Report and the achievements of the United Nations Online Network on Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN). It finally recommended that 23 June be designated as United Nations Public Service Day.

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Introduction

1. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration met at the United Nations Headquarters from 22 to 26 July 2002. The Committee was established by the Economic and Social Council through Resolution 2001/45 of 20 December 2001. The Committee consists of 24 experts appointed in their personal capacity by the Economic and Social Council upon the nomination of the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

2. The meeting was attended by the following members: Ms. Marie-Francoise Bechtel (France), Director, Ecole Nationale d'Administration; Dr. Rachid Benmokhtar Benabdellah (Morocco), President, Al Akhawayn University; The Honourable Jocelyne Bourgon (Canada), President, Canadian Centre for Management Development; Dr. Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira (Brazil) Professor, Getúlio Vargas Foundation; Professor Giuseppe Franco Ferrari (Italy), Chair for Public Comparative Law, L. Bocconi University of Milan; Ms. Geraldine J. Fraser-Moleketi (South Africa), Minister for Public Service and Administration; Professor Dr. Werner Jann (Germany), Chair for Political Science, Administration and Organization, Potsdam University; Mr. Jin Liqun (China), Vice Minister of Finance; Dr. Barbara Kudrycka (Poland), Rector, Bialystok School of Public Administration; Mr. Gonzalo D. Martner Fanta (Chile), Deputy Secretary, Ministerio Secretaria, General de la Presidencia; Dr. Kuldeep Mathur (India), Academic Director, Centre for the Study of Law and Governance, Jawaharlal Nehru University; Mr. Beshara Merhej (Lebanon), Member of Parliament and Minister of State; Professor José Oscar Monteiro (Mozambique); Professor Akira Nakamura (Japan), Dean of the Graduate School, Department of Political Science, Meiji University; Professor Dr. Apolo Nsibambi (Uganda), Prime Minister, Uganda; Professor Dennis A. Rondinelli (United States), Glaxo Distinguished International Professor of Management, Kenan-Flagler Business School, University of North Carolina; Mr. Otton Solis-Fallas (Costa Rica), Member of the Board of the Open University of Costa Rica; Dr. Borwornsak Uwanno (Thailand), Secretary-General, King Prajadhipok Institute; and Mr. Volodymyr G. Yatsuba (Ukraine), State Secretary, Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. The following members could not attend: Mr. Jean-Marie Atangana Mebara (Cameroon), Minister of Higher Education; Mr. Petrus Compton (Saint Lucia, West Indies), Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, Saint Lucia, West Indies; Mr. Jaime Rodriguez-Arana Munoz (Spain), Director, Instituto Nacional de Administracion Publica (INAP); Ms. Patricia A. Santo Tomas (The Philippines), Minister of Labor and Employment; and Mr. Sakhir Thiam (Senegal), President, University of Dakar-Bourguiba.
3. In accordance with Economic and Social Council Decision 2002/206, the Committee of Experts on Public Administration discussed the following agenda: (a) enhancing the capacity of public administration to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration, (b) basic data on the public sector, and (c) United Nations activities on public administration.
4. The Committee elected, by acclamation, the following officers: namely, Chairperson: H.E. Prime Minister Apolo Nsibambi (Uganda); four Vice-Chairpersons: Ms. Marie-Francoise Bechtel (France), Dr. Luiz Carlos Bresser-Pereira (Brazil), Mr. Jin Liqun (China) and Mr. Beshara Merhej (Lebanon); and Rapporteur: Ms. Jocelyne Bourgon (Canada).

I. Main Findings and Recommendations

5. The Committee of Experts on Public Administration is placing the transformation of governance and public administration at the forefront of the United Nations agenda. The Committee of Experts stressed the urgency of supporting Member States to build capacity to meet the basic needs of their people at the dawn of the new millennium. The Committee applauded the historical global consensus on targets for meeting basic needs, established

through the Millennium Declaration. It also recognized the importance of reforming governance and public administration institutions in attaining the vision of sustainable human development of the Millennium Declaration.

6. The Committee of Experts expressed its appreciation for the high quality work of the Secretariat in preparing the following background documents used during the course of this meeting:
 - *The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: institutional capacity development (E/C.16/2002/4);*
 - *The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: human resources development (E/C.16/2002/3);*
 - *Financial capacity of the public sector to implement the United Nations Millennium Declaration (E/C.16/2002/6);*
 - *Capacity of the public sector to support the creation and application of knowledge, innovation and technology for development (E/C.16/2002/5);*
 - *The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: e-government, known applications and enabling environment (E/C.16/2002/7);*
 - *Basic data on the public sector (E/C.16/2002/2); and*
 - *Review of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance.*

The Committee wishes to use these documents in the future as *reference documents* and therefore suggests that the Secretariat review these documents with a view to reflecting the suggestions of the experts, consolidating and streamlining where appropriate. The text of the background documentation can be found at www.unpan.org/conf_groupeexperts.asp

7. The Committee recognized that there is *no universal blueprint* for reforms. However, it believes that much can be gained from the practices of the United Nations Member States. The Committee further recognized that specific national agendas for change must be shaped within the countries themselves, taking into account their specific social and economic conditions. The Committee hopes that its work can help reformers around the world by identifying good practices, highlighting lessons learned and reducing risks.
8. *Governance* reflects the sum of the multifaceted interactions among the State, the market and civil society. The Committee is focusing on *State governance*, given the importance of the State, its impact on its partners, and its crucial role as an enabler of the market and civil society. Public administrations alone cannot meet all the challenges of governance. The private sector and civil society also have an important role. Working in partnership with other governance players and stakeholders is necessary.
9. The Committee recognized the importance of *building on reform efforts* carried out during recent decades. Countries have made progress towards sound fiscal management and have

carried out financial reforms. An international consensus on financing for development was achieved at the 2002 Monterrey Conference. *The Millennium Declaration expresses a comprehensive vision for sustainable human development.*

10. The Committee is convinced that the global consensus, expressed in the Millennium Declaration, offers a remarkable opportunity for the United Nations to show leadership in the area of good governance and sound public administration.

A. Global Priorities

11. In its report, the Committee neither attempted to summarize the documents presented nor to give a detailed account of the discussions held during the week. Instead, it attempted to extract the *key elements of a consensus* that could *guide future work* in support of the implementation of the Millennium Declaration.
12. In selecting the major priority areas for future work, the Committee hoped to guide Member States through the Economic and Social Council by pointing towards domains presenting *great challenges* and *great opportunities* for State governance and public administration in the future. The Committee decided to identify a *targeted* and *highly selective number* of areas rather than to prepare an exhaustive list of recommendations in order to encourage *real progress* over a short period of time.
13. The challenge of good State governance is about *capacity-building* through people and institutions. Through their knowledge, know-how and skills, people are at the heart of the performance of the State, for it is people who provide services, innovate and carry out reforms. Good governance must take account of the culture and circumstances of Member States.
14. *The Committee recommended that future work on State governance and public administration should be focused on six key areas:*

Challenge No. 1: To build capacity, the public sector must recruit and retain its fair share of the best talent.

15. Member States should consider identifying and studying the key elements of a strategy aimed at achieving the above. Some elements are predictable. Much depends on:
 - the reputation of public sector institutions;
 - an efficient recruitment strategy, based on merit and competence combined with a retention strategy of the most critical skills; and
 - reasonable compensation and adequate working conditions.
16. However, much more work needs to be done in order to:
 - understand the interdependency of these elements and identify good practices;

- promote ethical standards and combat corruption;
- recognize diversity, promote inclusiveness and gender equality;
- address the brain drain issue, resulting from the competition for talent between the private and public sectors and between the developing and developed countries; and
- focus the work of public sector institutions on those functions that only the State can perform or can best perform.

Challenge No. 2: In response to the impact of globalization and the emergence of a knowledge-based economy, public sector institutions must become “learning organizations”, recognized as strong and strategic institutions.

17. Member States should consider exploring the concept of public sector learning organizations, and identifying the essential elements as well as the concrete steps needed to support this transformation.
18. This transformation will take different forms and proceed at different paces, depending upon the circumstances of Member States, but it will likely involve shifts such as:
 - from individual task to the performance of the overall organization;
 - from focus on a job to focus on mission and results;
 - from training to lifelong learning;
 - from repetition of predictable functions to innovation;
 - from employment for life to employability with safeguards;
 - from a top-down management model to horizontal teams and networks; and
 - from an inward to outward orientation towards all segments of society.
19. The purpose of this transformation effort would be to explore how to create a dynamic culture that could be conducive for the developing countries to “leap-frog” over stages of development and to reap more rapidly the benefits of a nascent knowledge economy.
20. Furthermore, the conceptual work will be essential to support progress in the sectoral areas responsible for the issues highlighted in the Millennium Declaration and Road Map such as income poverty, hunger, access to water and sanitation, slums, health, education, employment, gender and environment. Member States will better achieve the targets in these areas if they can rely on *innovations* and *horizontal processes*, exemplified by public sector learning organizations.
21. The Committee believes that the search for improvements in service delivery would more likely be successful through the participation of beneficiaries.

Challenge No. 3: Capacity-building in support of State governance will require the harnessing of the power of information and communication technologies in support of *innovation*.

22. Capturing data and disseminating *information* is a challenge for all governments. However, they are only the first steps towards capturing *knowledge* and supporting *innovation* in the public sector, the economy and the society at large.
23. The Committee recognized the quality of the work done by the Secretariat on *Capacity of the public sector to support the creation and application of knowledge, innovation and technology for development* and on *The critical role of public administration and good governance in implementing the United Nations Millennium Declaration: e-government, known applications and enabling environment*, and recommended further work to better define the role of the State as *enabler* and as *user* of knowledge and technology *in order to support and encourage innovation* throughout the public administration and the society as a whole.
24. As enabler, the role of the State includes:
- building the “learning infrastructure” of its country, including sector-specific systems for knowledge, innovation and technology in areas such as health, education and poverty alleviation;
 - connectivity and networks; and
 - a legislative framework that is conducive to innovation, that encourages private sector investments and promotes the use of information and communication technology.
25. As user, public sector institutions can set a powerful example by using knowledge, innovation and technology in their operations, and can transform the operations of government by:
- encouraging transparency and accountability;
 - improving service delivery (quality, timeliness, efficiency);
 - providing services in a citizen-centred way; and
 - making available knowledge and technology that is publicly owned.

Challenge No. 4: Capacity-building in support of State governance requires the alignment of financial and management capacities to ensure the optimal mobilization and use of resources.

26. Much has been done in recent years to improve financial management (financial policies, resource mobilization, accounting and reporting). Sustainable progress requires an integrated and more holistic approach to capacity-building, linking finance

and management, inputs and outputs and rooting them in oversight bodies, including the public at large.

27. Whatever the philosophy of the government in office and whatever the scope of its activities, *governments should make efforts to work better*: that is, optimize results for any given level of resources. In this regard, further work is required in order to identify the critical factors that could guide Member States' decisions on the proper balance between centralized and decentralized responsibilities in fiscal and financial administration.
28. Member States may need the help of the Secretariat to identify how public administration reforms can best increase effectiveness and efficiency, reduce the cost of government, and free resources to meet higher societal needs.

Challenge No. 5: Capacity-building also means to design and implement effective combinations of decentralization and centralization policies and programmes in order to promote people-centred development.

29. Member States should consider designing and implementing effective decentralization policies and programmes (financial and administrative) and building capacity of governance institutions at the central, subnational and local levels to accomplish the Millennium Development Goals.
30. This involves, among other things, the following:
 - examining appropriate types of deconcentration, delegation and devolution;
 - assessing new capacities needed at the central, subnational and local levels to make these work;
 - forging partnerships between the public sector organizations at the multi-levels and in governance institutions at the centre, including electoral management bodies, parliamentary support structures, and judicial administration;
 - providing legal context for the participation of civil society organizations in public sector-initiated policies and programmes; and
 - analysing subsidiarity of authority and resources.
31. Much more work needs to be done to:
 - understand linkages between decentralization and poverty reduction, including enhanced access to such services as primary health care, education and shelter;
 - strengthen capacity of electoral management bodies and support structures for parliaments;
 - improve financial and administrative capacity of local governments;

- enhance cooperation among local governments;
- identify functions that are more conducive to centralized or decentralized modes of programme design and implementation;
- strengthen central-local fiscal relations; and
- promote “local-local” partnerships among local actors from the civil society, the business sector and local governments.

Challenge No. 6: State capacity-building can be assisted by evidence-based international data.

32. The Committee noted the importance of the World Public Sector Report and complimented the Secretariat for the relevance and quality of this first issue.
33. The Committee recognized the importance of the work done by the Secretariat to date in the areas of identification and collection of the basic data on the public sector in the world. **The Committee showed a keen interest in pushing the discussion and work further, and therefore recommended mandating a Subcommittee to refine a proposal prepared by the Secretariat on the Global Public Sector Monitor.**

B. The Special Needs of Africa

34. The Millennium Declaration highlights the special needs of African countries. Although every country in the world faces challenges in building capacity in governance and public administration, this work is far more daunting in Africa. The challenges come from the continent’s recent history, poverty in many countries, violent conflict, communicable diseases (including HIV/AIDS) and marginalization in a globalizing world.
35. The Committee recognized the efforts of the African people over the years in bringing about public sector reforms. The modern State and administration in Africa, given their particular history, are not fully rooted in the society as a whole and are therefore fragile and unstable. Support for public administration, in order to reach the Millennium Declaration Goals, requires strengthening the legitimization of public institutions, which:
- will involve rebuilding or building, in some cases, more than improving existing structures;
 - requires the study of the articulation among the necessary modern states, public administrations and less-known but functional mechanisms of governance at community and societal levels; and
 - should take into account the organizational culture of Africa.

36. In view of the fact that Africa is most at risk of not meeting the goals set out in the Road Map of the Millennium Declaration, **the Committee recommended a special focus in terms of support, technical and professional assistance in Africa.**
37. It further recommended that all future work of the United Nations on State governance and public administration in Africa must take account of the initiatives planned or undertaken in terms of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), as well as the G-8 Africa Action Plan, in order to ensure maximum synergy and to be supportive of the partnership concept advocated by NEPAD.
38. Finally, the technical assistance activities of the United Nations Division for Public Economics and Public Administration should give priority attention to the needs of the region.

II. Review of the United Nations Programme on Public Administration and Finance

39. The Committee was briefed on the activities of the United Nations in the area of public administration, with a particular emphasis on the modalities of work mandated by the General Assembly in Resolutions 50/225 and 56/213. It also received the report from the Secretariat on the activities carried out until now. It reviewed proposals for future activities to assist the Secretary-General to prepare the proposed programme budget in this field for the biennium 2004-2005.
40. The Committee fully supported the proposed work programme and recognized the importance of strengthening public administration through the following main activities: enabling advocacy; developing analytical and policy tools; sharing experiences; coordinating development assistance in public administration; building a common understanding; and providing technical assistance in developing human resources, building institutions and ensuring technological adequacy and connectivity.
41. The Committee also expressed the hope that the United Nations Division for Public Economics and Public Administration will make relevant substantive contributions to major international events related to its work, such as inputs on e-government at the forthcoming World Summit on Information Society.
42. **As a new tool of advocacy, the Committee suggested that the Secretary-General provide, every one or two years, comments on the state of major governance issues. Such a statement could be made on the occasion of the United Nations Public Service Day. The Committee proposed, in this respect, that the United Nations Public Service Day coincide with the African Public Service Day, which is 23 June.**
43. The Committee took note with appreciation that the Secretariat was proceeding expeditiously with the implementation of the Economic and Social Council recommendation to confer public service awards to celebrate the value of public

service. **It also emphasized that the United Nations should focus on the priority areas identified by the Committee and on public administration issues related to the implementation of the Millennium Declaration in its future conferences and workshops.**

44. The Committee recognized that there is a significant demand and need for the development of analytical and policy tools, which can benefit all countries. It also pointed out that in order to respond to the needs of governments' officials effectively, analytical documents should be short, action-oriented and focused on the necessary conditions to ensure the successful implementation of good practices. A compendium of best practices should also be prepared and disseminated to Member States. The Committee also acknowledged that the World Public Sector Report is a very important policy tool and can greatly contribute to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.
45. The Committee reviewed the topic of the next issue of the World Public Sector Report and provided suggestions to the Secretariat. In addition, specific analytical and policy tools addressing the administrative dimensions of the key sectors to implement the Millennium Development Goals (e.g., poverty eradication, primary education and health) should be developed.
46. The Committee agreed that building a common understanding on governance issues through the exchange of best practices, major conferences and fora, is a crucial activity which should be pursued, building on the tremendous work the United Nations has already accomplished.
47. The Committee took note of the request contained in General Assembly Resolution 56/213 that "the Secretary-General study the possibility of periodically bringing together high-level policy makers responsible for public administration reform, under the auspices of the United Nations, to discuss issues of common interest and to share valuable experiences and practices". It also took note that the Secretariat, in response to this request, already intends to provide substantive support to the Global Forum on Reinventing Government, an existing initiative of this kind. Some members of the Committee felt that a more structured event under the direct auspices of the United Nations, such as the 50th resumed session of the General Assembly in 1996, would respond more closely to the request contained in Resolution 56/213.
48. **The Committee also stressed that information sharing and exchange of experiences is an important tool in strengthening public administration in developing countries and countries with economies in transition. It recognized the achievements of the United Nations Online Network on Public Administration and Finance (UNPAN) in facilitating such exchanges. It recommended that the role of UNPAN in providing advisory services and training be enhanced.** The Committee also provided useful direction on the implementation of the request of the General Assembly that the UNPAN be expanded to strengthen the capacity of national ministries and institutions of public administration.

49. **The Committee pointed out that since the Millennium Declaration places high priority on meeting the special needs of Africa, technical assistance should focus prevalently on this continent. It also recommended that technical assistance be linked to regional initiatives, such as NEPAD, and that it focus on groups of countries rather than individual Member States.** The Committee also suggested that when providing technical assistance, differences among countries should be taken into consideration and governments should be fully involved. Further, technical assistance should be directed to the priority areas highlighted by the Committee. **The Committee recommended that policy advice should be the main focus of technical assistance.** In the area of human resources capacity-building, the Committee commended the joint initiative of the United Nations Secretariat and the International Association of Schools and Institutes of Administration (IASIA).
50. The Committee took note of the activities of the Secretariat to ensure synergies in the work on public administration among the various departments and agencies of the United Nations system. It welcomed the contribution to the meeting of the observers from United Nations departments and agencies and other international and regional organizations. It encouraged the Secretariat to continue to build upon the contributions and the comparative advantages of the various departments and agencies. **Finally, it recognized the importance of the additional flow of development assistance to developing countries and countries in transition in this field. It endorsed the proposed initiative on aid management and accountability that could support this flow.**

Conclusion

51. The Committee expressed the view that it can serve as a “brain trust” or knowledge centre on State governance and public administration for the Economic and Social Council and the United Nations. Given the rapid changes and new developments that Member States face, it is important to pool technical expertise on emerging factors that impact upon their State capacity.
52. The State capacity-building activities by the Member States also have a direct impact upon meeting the Millennium Development Goals. **The Committee requested the Economic and Social Council to consider authorizing annual meetings of the Committee in order to follow the progress of Member States and of the United Nations in enhancing the capacity of public administration to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.**
53. The work of the Committee would be facilitated by having designated members make organizational decisions prior to its meetings. Further, the Economic and Social Council requires the Committee to set its meeting agendas in advance. Therefore, the Committee decided to create a Subcommittee to set its agendas and to prepare before its meetings. Other Subcommittees, whether by function or region, may also help in conducting the work of the Committee.

54. Overall, the Committee indicated its willingness to play an advocacy role on behalf of the international public administration community. There have been many United Nations and other global conferences on major themes, including the landmark Millennium Assembly. The challenge is to be relevant, focused and attuned to the follow-up activities on internationally agreed-upon commitments that affect governance and public administration.