

**United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration
Fourth Session, New York, 4 - 8 April 2005**

Agenda item 5

Enhancement of the celebration of the United Nations Public Service Day

**Promoting and rewarding innovations and excellence for revitalizing public
administration and service delivery: The United Nations Public Service
Awards**

Comments

by Werner Jann¹

The Secretariat's report on the United Nations public service awards outlines the critical importance of an effective, efficient, responsive and accountable Public Administration, both as an organisation and a profession, for good governance and for the overall development process including the achievement of international agreed goals such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There is broad consensus about that and there are given a number of important examples to illustrate this.

The written report of the Secretariat provides a good overview and a sound overall assessment about the **purpose and objectives** of the awards in this context, and about the procedures and achievements so far. There is very little than can be added to this report. I would underline and stress the objectives

- to detect and encourage innovation,
- to collect and disseminate best practice,

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- to promote networking and mutual learning, and
- to enhance professionalism and pride.

Perhaps it could be stressed even stronger, that "good public administration" is an indispensable prerequisite, a *sine qua non* for "good governance". None of the objectives of good governance will be achieved without improvements in public administrations, public services, public personnel and training, and public management. There is no Good Governance without Good Public Administration. Some of our neo-liberal colleagues may by now have learned about the importance of the rule of law for economic and social progress and well being, but I am not quite sure that they have understood the importance of public administration and public services. Since *Good Governance* is - quite rightly - such an important and widely accepted political goal of the UN, and since *Public Administration* and *Public Service* in some quarters still - even though quite often undeservedly - carry negative connotations (red tape, bureaucracy, clientelism and all that), it might be an option to rename the award the "UN Good Governance and Public Service Awards". This might indicate to a wider audience already in its name the political implications and importance of the award: Public Service is not there for its own sake but for strengthening and enabling Good Governance.

Concerning the **categories** of the awards the re-adjustment of the until now four categories to three is useful and productive since it stresses the most important instrument (ICT), at least for the foreseeable future, the most important function (service delivery) and the overall important values (transparency, accountability and responsiveness). I would suggest to continue with these categories for some years. This would enable the UN to gain more experience with the awards, but even more importantly it would give potential candidates and interested public organisations some time to get acquainted with the awards and with the criteria which govern them, and which have to be fulfilled. The audience and the awareness for the awards has to grow steadily and gradually, and for this stability

is important (everybody knows the categories in which you can win an "Oscar", it would be stupid to change that every year).

Concerning the **processes** for nomination and selection I would - based on my experience in serving on selection committees for other awards at the national level - like the committee to consider the following suggestions:

- Self-nomination should be accepted, perhaps it should even be the standard procedure. Obviously, each organisation knows best about its strengths and weaknesses. The compilation of the necessary documents, descriptions, summaries and narratives is already a sign of the viability and capacity of an organisation. In order to limit the number of self-nominations a requirement for at least two or three official sponsors could be added. One could even add the obligation that one sponsor has to be a non-governmental organisation.
- The Public Service Awards should only be given to public organisations, but that does not exclude successful arrangements of PPP, out-sourcing or contracting-out, quite to the contrary. These are necessary and useful, but also complex arrangements that can create substantial problems for both the public and the private sector if they are not properly designed and administered (as Professor Rondinelli pointed out in his comments last year). So the design and successful management of these arrangements should be explicitly recognised and rewarded.
- The suggested criteria for selecting the winners are plausible, but there are too many. They should be reduced to max. seven or so. The work load involved in the selection process has to be reduced, as have the numbers and the extent of the supporting documentation. Site visits are not necessary, supporting documents like letters of reference and evaluations should be sufficient. The convincing documentation of good practice is one

important criteria for winning and deserving the award. Regional offices of the UN should be used in the evaluation process.

- The combination of the awards with the United Nations Public Service Day is important and should be continued. The UN should use the awards both as a showcase for good public administration and as a data base for good or best practice. The documentation of award winning organisations and their projects should therefore be improved, especially through the UNPAN net. Winning organisations should furthermore be presented and used in training and other events.