

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**Statement by
MR. SHA ZUKANG
UNDER-SECRETARY-GENERAL FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS
TO THE 7TH SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION, 60TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION OF THE UN
PROGRAMME ON PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT
New York, 16 April 2008**

Madam President,
Mr. President of ECOSOC,
Distinguished Experts and Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to address the UN Committee of Experts on Public Administration for the first time as United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs.

Today, we commemorate the 60th anniversary of the United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Development. The Programme has come a long way since 1948, when it was created by the General Assembly. Allow me to share with you some reflections on the origins and achievements of the Programme.

From its very inception, the United Nations put a strong emphasis on international cooperation to promote economic and social development – as an end in itself and as a foundation for international peace and security.

In the early years of the Organization, public administration was identified as a major factor in promoting economic and social development. From its first session, in 1946, the General Assembly mandated the Organization to provide technical assistance in various economic and social fields, as an important form of support to its Member States.

The General Assembly, following on its Resolution 200 (III) of 1948, decided to build activities for strengthening public administration into all development programmes of the United Nations. This led to its approval, the next year, of the Expanded Programme of Technical Assistance, including all the public administration activities that were originally authorized in the 1948 Resolution.¹

In the six decades since then, the role of the Programme has evolved significantly, as the Organization and its Membership have grown and changed, and as the role of the state and citizens' perceptions of the state have changed.

¹ GA Resolution 304 (IV) 16 November 1949.

During this period, we have traversed a changing landscape – from the era of decolonization, state-building and modernization, to the public sector fiscal crises of the 1980s, and to the democratization waves of the 1990s and beyond. While we may not all agree on the exact chronology and concepts, we can see together an evolution of approaches to the enduring question of how far state authority should extend, and how public administrations should best respond to the needs and wants of citizens.

Changing realities have shaped the public debate on this question, and vice versa. This is the context in which the contribution of the UN Programme in Public Administration and Development can best be understood.

To highlight a few of its achievements, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Programme set up at least 14 national public administration institutions in newly independent states: Brazil (1952), United Arab Republic (1954), Argentina (1955), Ethiopia (1956), Libya (1957), Laos (1959), Colombia (1960), Sudan (1960), Ghana (1961), Somalia (1964), Yemen (1964), Libya (1967) and Niger (1968). And it assisted in the establishment of eight such institutions at the regional and sub-regional levels: in Turkey and the Middle East, EASAPAC, CAFRAD, CLAD, ACDA, ARADO, East African Community Management Development Institute, and ICPE. Some of these institutions are still active and working in partnership with the Programme.

Throughout the 1980s, the Group of Experts in Public Administration and Finance, the predecessor to this Committee, grappled with the questions surrounding the public sector fiscal crises and debt defaults. The Group sought to advise on ways that public administration could diminish the negative impact of austerity measures on people-centred development. The Group stressed that public administrations should work more in partnership with the private sector and civil society, within a larger framework of public governance.

During the 1990s, as a series of UN world conferences and summits emerged on the interconnected dimensions of development, the General Assembly dedicated its 50th Resumed Session, in 1996, to *Public Administration and Development*. At the session, for which the Programme provided the substantive support, Member States reaffirmed that the promotion of social justice, equity and equal access to quality services and productive assets, participatory mechanisms, and strengthened public administration and financial management capacities are all essential for sustainable development.

The Millennium Summit served to crystallize the set of internationally agreed development goals that has emerged from the conferences and summits, with governance and civic engagement among the key cross-cutting issues. Since then, the Programme has intensified its focus on the public administration and governance components of the United Nations Development Agenda.

The Programme pools and facilitates access to information, promotes research and training, facilitates advocacy and exchange of experiences, and provides technical advisory and capacity-building services, in support of national development strategies. To facilitate these efforts, the General Assembly, in 2002, endorsed UNPAN, the United Nations Online Network

in Public Administration and Finance. It also, in 2003, mandated the UN Public Service Day and Awards, and UN support to the Global Forum on Reinventing Government.

The contributions of the Programme cannot be fully separated from the contributions of this Committee, which provides us with valuable expertise and advice on strengthening governance and public administration for development. Although established in 2002, the Committee has its roots in the Group of Experts created in 1967. On behalf of the United Nations Secretariat, and the Member States that we serve, I would like to acknowledge and express appreciation for the dedication of all the Experts who have advised this Programme over the years.

During this 7th session, the Committee will focus especially on state capacity-development. With spiralling costs of life's necessities, such as food and energy, and projected downturns of many economies, the strengthening of state capacity to deal with development is as relevant today as ever. We look forward to the Committee's conclusions and recommendations on this front.

Thank you.