

## **BROADENING THE UN'S ACCESS TO QUALIFIED CANDIDATES FOR THE FIELD**

Summary of Recommendations from a Discussion  
held in New York on October 26, 2007

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On October 26<sup>th</sup> 2007, the Project on Justice in Times of Transition, in partnership with the International Crisis Group, the German Mission to the United Nations and DLA Piper facilitated a meeting that brought together senior UN policy makers with a broad range of roster representatives and outside organizations, such as New Perimeter of DLA Piper, to discuss the many challenges the UN, and Peacekeeping in particular, faces in identifying and hiring appropriate UN civilian staff for peace operations. The diverse group of individuals/ organizations in attendance helped to draw out the range of challenges faced and identified how some of these might be addressed differently. The broad representations also demonstrated a universal recognition that addressing the staffing issue is central to improving how peacekeeping is performed and achieved in a sustainable manner.

As **Jane Holl Lute**, the Deputy Assistant Secretary General of the UN Department of Field Support outlined at the beginning of the event, staffing a UN peace operations often means actively doing the impossible and the challenge has been growing. There are currently 30 UN missions in operation and the Dafur and Chad missions are demanding a more than 30% increase of Peacekeeping staff to be hired. Deploying the right people for civilian posts in these operations has consistently been the paramount challenge, especially hiring people who are qualified and willing to stay in these environments. In addition, Peacekeeping budgets are paid for by assessed contributions from member states, creating particular kinds of constraints on what can or can not be done and this affects the hiring process as much as it does other elements of the peace operation. Given the rapidly rising need for qualified civilian staff, Ms. Lute emphasized the UNs need for creative ideas on how to improve its outreach and welcomed help in making this process more manageable.

It was apparent that all participants agreed that significant improvements have been made in recent years relating to the hiring practices and processes that staff current peace operations. At the same time there was universal agreement that there is still significant space for more change. The recommendations listed below were formulated by the group in the general discussion as well as in separate breakout sessions focusing on: 1) outreach, 2) use of member state and non-member state rosters and 2) improving current job descriptions. The points below were formulated in an effort to create practical recommendations that can be implemented to by the various actors within or outside of the UN system.

## Recommendations to the Relevant Human Resources Departments at Peacekeeping in the Department of Field Support, United Nations

- A consistent theme throughout the day was the need for the UN to improve its **outreach** and how the UN might improve its outreach process.
  - In order to find qualified people the UN (Peacekeeping especially) needs to develop a recruitment process that is actively and creatively seeking to find the targeted people it needs. Some such outreach has begun, but more creative outreach that targets specific skill sets is needed.
  - Improving communications with existing member state and non-member state rosters and being more transparent about needs or particular expertise that is needed. This should also entail creating lists of existing rosters on their mandates, scope, and specialties and reaching out to better understand their particular strengths or working with them to improve any weaknesses.
  - Peacekeeping should make organizational flow charts available that explain the structure of the hiring process to outside actors and facilitate ways of finding a common language that defines the end goals in a uniform way with partners.
  - When staffing a mission, peacekeeping should identify to the public or to key rosters involved who its outreach people for a particular mission are in order to ensure better information flow between them and outside rosters or resources.
  - Human Resources in Peacekeeping might also consider facilitating online communities of practice, list serves or other electronic mechanisms to improve communications with outside partners, particularly in relation to relevant positions that need to be filled.
  - It might also entail include recruiting and utilizing outside experts to work in tandem with UN personnel in Peacekeeping Missions. Public-private partnerships can be an important component in the strengthening these missions. There are a number of outside organizations that manage networks of people with specializations in this field. Some provide services on a pro bono basis. These include:
    - The ABA network of lawyers that already recruits for UNDP
    - DLA Piper and its affiliated non-profit New Perimeter that have provided pro bono legal work to the UN Mission in Kosovo
    - The Initiative for Inclusive Security or the Project on Justice in Times of Transition that have a network of practitioners in transitional settings.
  - The UN and Peacekeeping might also think about offering training or internships to national staff in its existing missions with relevant skills or background (international law) but who have little or no international experience in order to better qualify them for future UN positions in other missions.
- A number of recommendations focused specifically on **the hiring process** and how to improve the process of planning and staffing for a mission.

- Participants agreed that the deployment process at DPKO urgently needs to be accelerated and streamlined. Too often positions are left vacant for weeks or even months resulting in a lack of continuity and loss of institutional memory. This has a direct impact on the quality of the UN's work in a mission. The lengthy hiring process also tends to reinforce itself as the best candidate, by the time he or she is offered the position, has already accepted a post elsewhere.
- In order to improve the selection and hiring process itself Department of Field Support might consider within their integrated teams pairing human resources staff with individuals that have relevant skills and experience to help in the selection of appropriate candidates. Such expertise would help hire more appropriate people by having them read resumes and interpret responses to interviews based on practical experience and knowledge of skill set needed on the ground.
- When staffing a mission, the initial focus should be on getting senior positions filled first. Once these are put in place human resources should work with senior staff to get the rest of the mission placements filled. This order ensures better long term relations among staff within a mission.
- Another strategy recommended for the hiring process involved hiring talented local staff (i.e. nationals of the country in which the mission is placed) on short term assignments at the outset of missions. This helps to ensure that there is expertise on the ground on local conditions and needs and often ends up empowering these individuals for other jobs within the local mission or for other future UN missions elsewhere. In fact it was highly recommended that the UN use this strategy to recruit a more diverse international staff.
- The UN Peacekeeping human resources division should create a database that tracks staff movements and immediately clears them from repeated clearance processes as they move from position to position. This would enable quicker hiring and placements in the future.
- Current job descriptions listed on the Galaxy system should be reevaluated and rewritten to appeal to people not familiar with "UN speak." This would make positions more accessible to non-native English speakers and enable the UN to reach a broader pool of individuals. It would most likely also attract more women to UN posts.
- Specific recommendations from the working group that looked at current generic UN job descriptions for rule of law suggested that Peacekeeping:
  - shorten the descriptions and put the criteria into bullets rather than paragraph form to make them easy to read
  - put the qualifications sought at the outset of the description rather than a paragraph on what the UN is
  - make sure the job description should address and describe living and working conditions
  - make the job descriptions are more department specific and possibly mission specific
  - the description should look more appealing especially for targeting subgroups like women or people from developing nations ---- for example, have someone who is an expert on gendered words look at all of these descriptions and provide a gendered view of what the words imply. Similar advice could be gathered for specific cultural groups the UN is targeting.

- The job descriptions should avoid unnecessary repetition (mentioning diversity once is enough)
  - Job descriptions should list competencies in priority order. i.e. if you want women, put “issues related to gender and human rights” as number one on the list.
  - Indicate in the job description which location the position is for. People may not apply for certain locations or be more qualified for others.
  - languages needed for the job should be stated upfront (i.e. don’t just list local languages - mention which specific languages are required)
  - the language of the description itself should be simplified and made understandable to individuals who have not worked in the UN system in the past. (For example, what is a “section report” versus an “assessment?” This won’t mean anything to anyone who has not worked in the UN.)
- When planning for a mission the UN should consider outsourcing certain parts of the planning process to trusted outside sources (UN Security Council Report?), especially as Peacekeeping is restricted in planning for missions before a mandate is voted on in the GA.
- The group agreed that United Nations should improve their **investment in its existing workforce**. There are many talented and experienced people already in the UN system, but for a variety of reasons many don’t stay with the United Nations long term. A variety of approaches were recommended to reduce the high turn over at missions and to help keep talented staff at the UN and in Peacekeeping particular. Two main recommendations involved encouraging **career development**/training and working to **improve staff moral**.
  - One way to keep existing staff is to offer career development opportunities. Potentially career development could also be used to steer staff to particular specializations needed within peacekeeping at the UN. A particular focus within training and career development should also be to offer training in management and or mentoring, both skills that are often needed but lacking in peacekeeping missions.
  - One of the reasons given repeatedly for high turn over at UN peace operations was low staff moral. A number of simple recommendations were formulated by participants that entailed policy adjustments that would likely help improve moral greatly. One such recommendation was not to ban to Skype, so that staff can better communicate with their families while on mission.
  - Better access to families and making missions more family friendly were discussed at length and in consideration of the fact that UN missions are usually not in family friendly settings. Many agreed that enabling staff to stay in touch with their families was an important way of improving moral and keeping good staff. Recommendations included creating more flexibility in the way that some expert/specialist staff (such as rule of law and justice experts) are deployed. This might include shorter periods in country as well as drawing on their expertise by e-mail from home. There are currently significant restrictions on UN DPKO utilizing experts in this way.
- Participants at the event also recommended that Peacekeeping **improve its performance evaluation system**. This would create mechanisms to reward good staff and also help to weed out less qualified staff.

- Participants at the event openly discussed current **usage of rosters** by different UN departments and why rosters work or do not work. It was recommended that Peacekeeping in particular find a new formula for relating to rosters by reaching out to them, providing more information about their own decision making processes, their needs for particular missions and in general. They should find ways to utilize or even transform existing rosters to help in improved outreach processes and strategic planning for future missions. More specifically:
  - Peacekeeping should also consider ways of making it easier to track applicants associated with rosters on the application. For example they could add a pop up question in the application process asking “how were you referred.” This would introduce a mechanism for the UN to reach out to the rosters to help facilitate first level screening processes for example.
  - Peacekeeping should find ways of communicating status of applications to rosters so that they can help manage expectations of candidates and thereby engage them to help reduce application load for all positions. (i.e. prevent bad candidates from applying again and again.)
  - Peacekeeping should also recognize that rosters can help manage expectations of candidates and funnel information to rosters about targeted needs for particular positions, thereby seeking their assistance in outreach and in finding those people.

### **Recommendations to Roster Representatives**

- In order for rosters to be utilized more by the UN they need to match the skill set of the people enlisted in their rosters more closely with the specific needs in the field.
- Nation state rosters should consider diversifying the geographic representation in their rosters in order to enable access to a diverse pool of qualified candidates to Peacekeeping. Rather than focusing on bringing nationals of their own country into the system the focus should instead be on the sorts of skills and training that particular member states offers to the pool of candidates in their roster.
- Rosters should actively seek to solicit more qualified women into their lists in order to help Peacekeeping better meet the goals of Resolution 1325.
- Roster representatives should take the lead in conducting regular coordination meetings among them in order to share strategies and coordinate specializations servicing the UN system.
- Rosters should also consider creating a formal consortium or single point of contact for all rosters so that it is easier for the UN to communicate to all roster representatives at once.
- In addition, rosters should take the lead in creating better communications and policy coordination among them and with Peacekeeping. These should be designed in a manner that helps improve the UN’s outreach capacity.
- Additional systems of communication should be introduced between Rosters and with UN Peacekeeping in order to facilitate enhanced coordination generally relating to staffing of missions, preparing of civilian staff for recruitment or even improving other human resources

issues such as staff moral. Electronic systems (such as list serves or bi-weekly e-mails updating others of relevant improvements) should be used.

### **Recommendations to Member States**

- Spend the time to consider these recommendations in depth and to understand why improving staff hiring processes are directly related to making peacekeeping missions more effective and ultimately enabling shorter missions and earlier exit strategies.
- Consider ways to allow Peacekeeping more flexibility, especially relating to strategic planning and hiring for peace operations.
- Consider creating or supporting existing member state rosters in a manner that enables these to conduct outreach and recruit qualified staff for future UN missions.