



Reaction to Recent Judgment UNDT/2013/176 of 20 December 2013

Carman Louise Lapointe to: OIOS-ALL

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Dear Colleagues:

A number of you and others have expressed concern about the possible fallout from this recent judgement and have asked what OIOS management is doing, if anything, in response.

First of all, as the judgement itself is subject to potential appeal, it would be inappropriate for me to comment publicly on a matter that cannot yet be considered final.

Nevertheless, management in OIOS is not doing nothing.

No doubt the biggest room we ever have is room for improvement. Numerous changes have been implemented in our Investigations Division to improve operations, prior to and following a complete review of the working methods and processes by an external independent panel of experts I convened to do so in 2012. Changes include the recent hiring of two additional Deputy Directors--one located in Nairobi, the other in Vienna--bringing the total to three, including New York. All three Deputy Director positions were vacant for several years but are now fully staffed, providing us with opportunities to leverage this additional capacity to improve the quality and timeliness of our investigations work.

Each of the three Deputy Directors is now directly and equally responsible for the quality and timely completion of cases assigned within their geographical area of responsibility. Caseloads ongoing are being reviewed monthly in meetings I am holding with Deputy Directors together with Section Chiefs and the Director. These meetings reinforce the importance of prioritisation and timeliness, as well as for not over-investing our scarce resources on cases that are relatively very weak and/or lower priority. As USG for OIOS, I have a legitimate role to play in such matters, and am exercising it more visibly through these reviews.

In 2014, performance in the Investigations Division will take into account the timeliness of completion with targets of an average of 6 months and a maximum of 12 months on individual cases. Procedural changes underway will enable achievement of these targets.

Furthermore, central services, including the Professional Practices, Digital Forensics, Research and Analysis and Intake Committee secretariat responsibilities, have been centralised under one Operational Standards and Support Unit reporting directly to Michael Stefanovic, the Director of the Division.

Many other changes have been made or are underway to improve methodologies, including recording and transcribing of key interviews and reporting and evidence protocols to speed up the delivery of outputs and ensure their protection. Training needs assessments will be considered as part of a professional development strategy for our staff to ensure we have the skills and tools to support the changes. These changes are being monitored actively by our Independent Audit Advisory Committee, which oversees our work in OIOS and provides advice to the General Assembly.

Specifically with regard to the handling of reports of possible misconduct by staff of the Investigations

Division, there are also developments ongoing. A formal group has recently been formed of representatives of investigative functions in the United Nations, its separately administered funds and programs and specialised agencies. While the draft Charter for the group is currently being consulted, its work has already begun. A formal mechanism has been outlined and proposed for the handling of complaints against staff members of the member organizations' investigative units. The mechanism will provide for independent investigation of such complaints to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest. This mechanism has already been operating informally, and will be formalised following review and adoption by member organizations.

Finally, as you are aware, we are currently working with an organizational development specialist to diagnose and hopefully improve the less than ideal work atmosphere, particularly in the New York office of the division. I hope that 2014 will be a turnaround year, where our competent and professional investigators will be able to direct their energies to their work and the important difference we make to transparency and accountability in our organization.

Despite all the changes that have taken place and are underway, rest assured that OIOS senior management is actively reviewing this judgment carefully to determine whether additional actions may be appropriate.

OIOS is producing, in my view, some of the best and most significant work ever in the Investigations Division, as well as in the Internal Audit and Inspection and Evaluation Divisions. We have a right to be proud of our accomplishments.

We can and do make a difference for the better, at times in spite of ourselves. I hope you agree.

I wish you all a very productive, healthy and happy 2014.

Warm regards,
Carman



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