

# VIEW FROM HEADQUARTERS

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## REVIEW OF UN POLITICAL FUNCTIONS COMPLETED

The Secretary-General has completed a review of the political functions of the UN Secretariat and initiated a number of changes in other areas as well as part of the streamlining efforts mandated by the General Assembly. Outcome thus far: the creation of two offices, the elimination of three and the juggling and reduction of a number of high level staff.

Specifically, on the consolidation or elimination side:

- The Office of Special Political Questions and the Department for Political Affairs, Trusteeship and Decolonization have been combined to form one new Department. Its new name: the Department for Special Political Questions, Regional Cooperation, Decolonization and Trusteeship.

- The Department of Administration and Management has taken over responsibility for Field Operational and External Support Activities, with the concurrent elimination of the separate office covering these activities.

- The Department for Political and General Assembly Affairs will take responsibility for servicing CPC, ECOSOC and other bodies currently served by the Office of Secretariat Services for Economic and Social Matters (OSSECS). OSSECS, as a separate office, will no longer exist.

- The Director-General in Geneva now heads the Centre for Human Rights. The separate post of Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights no longer exists.

- The Director-General in Vienna now heads the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs. The separate post of Assistant Secretary-General heading CSDHA has been eliminated.

On the addition side,

- A new Office for Research and the Collection of Information has been created which will report directly to the Secretary-

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UN Secretariat: Bare floors (which do not absorb sound as well as carpeted floors), lack of privacy (which markedly heightens stress and lowers concentration) and the general appearance of a besieged World War II army base show that a review and re-organization of physical working space at Headquarters is necessary and long overdue.





Nemi Fredner and colleague Poover.

## Nemi Fredner: Carrying on a family tradition

On 4 May Ms. Nemi Fredner celebrated her tenth year of service at UNDP (Technical Advisory Division) with a large and joyous programme held in the Dag Hammarskjöld Auditorium. Following is an interview with Ms. Fredner.

*Question:* You recently observed your tenth anniversary of service at UNDP with a programme and reception attended by over 200 staff members. What prompted you to celebrate this occasion?

*Ms. Fredner:* The tenth anniversary was really just an excuse to invite as many colleagues as possible to share in an inspiring and festive occasion. I feel that I have received much in my life, and I would like to give as much as possible to others, especially those with whom I have been working for a number of years.

*Question:* You have been a secretary at UNDP. Have you found the work challenging? Rewarding? Frustrating? Degrading?

*Ms. Fredner:* I do not find secretarial work degrading, particularly because it is a form of

service, and I believe that one has to be equally willing to serve or to lead as necessity demands, with equal dignity and grace.

*Question:* As a UN staff member, I'm curious about this one—Do you feel yourself to be a UNDP staff member, a UN staff member, or both, and in what order of priority?

*Ms. Fredner:* I am very much a UNDP staff member, and lucky enough to have become acquainted with several hundred of my colleagues because of the nature of my work and the manageable size of UNDP headquarters. However, I feel that I belong to the UN as a whole, both because of the strong dedication of the Peace Meditation Group at the UN, to which I belong, and because of my family background: my mother was a social secretary to the first Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, and my father's brother served as a UN administrative officer from 1946 until his death in 1964. I feel as though I was destined for the UN!

*Question:* I understand that you were an undergraduate at Radcliffe College and completed graduate studies at Columbia Teachers College and that, in fact, you originally had some difficulty in being allowed to stay at UNDP as a secretary because of your academic achievements. Why did you want to stay at UNDP? Do you ever have any regrets about the turn your career has taken at the United Nations?

*Ms. Fredner:* I was always geared toward a highly academic life, but found myself more interested in pursuing spiritual goals than in fulfilling intellectual or professional ambitions. As a member of the Meditation Group at the UN, I have benefited immeasurably from the inspiration of Sri Chinmoy, and I try to take to heart his message, as powerfully conveyed in this poem:

"My Lord,

Do teach me only one thing:  
How to love the world  
The way You love me."

I have no regrets about taking up secretarial service, because I am fortunate to know what I want

out of life. Although my workload is often heavy, I feel free to be exactly the person I want to be, without conforming to the pressures, both self-imposed and external, of professional aims. My spiritual life provides me with many opportunities to follow my interests and capacities, such as music and writing.

I am very pleased to be with UNDP because I believe that it is achieving significant results in the developing world, and I try to put my full commitment into my work.

*Question:* What do you feel are some of UNDP's greatest strengths? In what areas would you see greater improvements to be made?

*Ms. Fredner:* I don't consider myself qualified to comment on UNDP's performance in a technical way. However, I think we can all feel that our great strength is our direct involvement in development projects which produce measurable results and lasting impact in so many countries. As far as improvements are concerned, I think the most important improvement for UNDP, as for the UN as a whole, would be for us to unabashedly rededicate ourselves, on a daily basis, to the founding principles of the UN; to be openly proud of and committed to our work, whatever our level may be; and to set aside the wish for personal gain in the interest of the UN as a whole, especially during this time when we are subject to both valid and unfair criticisms from all sides. I would also hope that each staff member could feel that his or her attitude and performance do make a difference; in fact, they shape the fate of our organization.

**View from Headquarters** is an informal newsletter. Suggestions, contributions and comments are welcome. Please address all correspondence to the Editor, Nayana Hein, Room DC2-1245.

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## JOHN PLATE: REFLECTIONS, OPTIMISM AFTER 17 YEARS OF SERVICE

*Mr. John Plate, who is Chief of the Development Analysis Branch, DIESA, has served the United Nations for 17 years. He recently returned to Headquarters after serving seven years in Vienna. Following is an interview with Mr. Plate.*

**Question:** What changes have you seen take place at the UN during your 17 years here?

**Mr. Plate:** I would say one of the biggest changes has been the growing globalization of the staff. Much of the uniqueness of the Secretariat as it now stands is traceable to the wide variety of professional training and experience of the staff. The Secretariat also come from a larger number of countries and have more diverse backgrounds.

**Question:** What is your own background?

**Mr. Plate:** I joined the Secretariat after having held several other positions—as a lecturer at The City University of New York and Hofstra University, an official with a private development assistance organization, and two years with the President's Council on Youth Opportunity in Washington, D.C. My academic area of specialization was political science and international relations.

**Question:** Let's talk a bit about what you've called the "emerging global nature" of the UN's responsibilities, by which I take it you mean problems and opportunities that need to be confronted on a global, rather than a national or even regional basis. How do these global responsibilities relate to the intergovernmental nature of the Organization?

**Mr. Plate:** The United Nations deals with, and reflects, two realities at work in the world today. First, there is an increasing awareness by peoples throughout the world of their uniqueness in terms of culture and history and of their economic and political interests relative to other peoples. You might say this is reflected in the "intergovernmental" aspect of the Organization.



Mr. John Plate

The second reality is the increasing commonality of influences on culture, and on economic and political interests—"globalization". These two realities provide the dynamic by which the United Nations remains relevant to the critical issues of the present and the future.

**Question:** At times it seems that trying to deal with these two realities creates more problems than it resolves. Can the UN cope?

**Mr. Plate:** The UN is now undergoing reform. Reform is not a new word at the United Nations. The virtual universality of membership in the Organization—of large and small States, of States at different stages of development, of States that, outside the United Nations, are at odds with one another, sometimes violently—is a reminder that the United Nations serves some universally felt need.

What may seem to some as a top-heavy structure was built along the way, pragmatically, to

reflect all the interests that the Organization includes. The fact that these interests haven't been digested in a classic organizational manner is not as indicative of chaos as some would maintain. After all, there were few, if any, classic organizational guidelines along the way. But the digestive process is inevitable, and the current reform movement should be seen in this light.

**Question:** I'm going to ask you a tough question. The public is quite familiar, at least superficially, with the political work of the United Nations. If you had to explain its work in social policy and social development—in terms of relevance and output—what would you say?

**Mr. Plate:** I'll limit my answer to the work of the United Nations itself, and not include the work of organizations such as UNICEF, ILO and WHO.

In recent years we have taken a two-part approach this issue. First, we prepare cross-sectoral studies on current and emerging  
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## UN Review Completed

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General and disseminate political information to the Secretary-General and relevant departments. A novel function of the Office will be the Research and Early Warning Service to alert the Secretary-General of situations requiring his immediate attention.

- A new Office for Programme Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring and Evaluation has been established within A & M which will bring together in one Department duties now scattered among several. Its major functions will be medium term planning, programme budgeting, monitoring, evaluation and substantive secretariat servicing to the CPC, ACABQ and the Fifth Committee. It is a major effort by the UN to improve ongoing self-scrutiny.

- The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Law of the Sea is being re-named the Office for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea. With the new name goes the acknowledgement that ocean affairs will receive a long-term, discrete organizational framework within the UN. Most Secretariat maritime matters will be consolidated in this office.

An in-depth review of the UN's activities in the economic and social sectors is in process and should be completed by the end of 1987, as should a review of its work for public information.

(The descriptions in this article are synoptical and unofficial. For an in-depth, official description of the structural and other changes taking place within the Secretariat, see A/42/234 and Corr.1, *Reform and renewal in the United Nations: progress report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 41/213.*)

*The dignity and worth of the human person is not merely a philosophic concept. It is, and should be, a working principle of human existence guiding our daily lives.*

—U Thant



UNDP: Carpeting and private or semi-private working areas show concern for the morale and efficiency of staff.

## PLATE INTERVIEW

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social policy issues and on efforts to deal with those issues. A principal output in this regard is the very wide-ranging and comprehensive Report on the World Social Situation, which is issued every four years, with an up-dated "highlights" report every two years. We also monitor the implementation of the 1969 Declaration on Social Progress and Development and prepare studies on the relationship to social policy of major global sectoral concerns, such as human settlements and the environment.

In addition, the Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs, based in Vienna, has for a number of years undertaken programmes to promote and advocate the interests of certain sectors of the world population, including women, youth, the aging, disabled persons and migrant workers. It has carried out a major programme in crime prevention and criminal justice, which one might say relates to issues of dysfunction in social policy. The CSDHA has also

spelled out how certain policy instruments, such as family policy, social welfare programmes and co-operatives, can promote social development. Considering the resources allocated to all of these efforts, I think it is fair to say that the output—studies, technical co-operation activities, consciousness-building and standard-setting activities—has been very substantial.

How relevant have all these efforts been? Relevance is a subjective term, but again I think it is fair to say that these activities touch a number of deeply-felt needs among Governments, among the individuals and groups concerned and among scholars and policy-makers at all levels. The fact that literally hundreds of NGOs continue to be actively involved with the UN in developing these policy issues, and that the GA and ECOSOC continue to elaborate these issues and identify new ones in the social sphere, suggest that there is a growing concern with social policy and social development issues, both nationally and internationally.







**Nemi Fredner and colleague Poover.**

# **Nemi Fredner: Carrying on a family tradition**