

**BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO OLD VALUES:  
ENVISIONING A POSITIVE CULTURE FOR THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM  
A Workshop Series**

**WORKSHOP I: THE UN SECRETARIAT AND A POSITIVE CULTURE  
7 November 2007, 777 UN Plaza, New York**

**DEBRIEFING SUMMARY**

Featured speaker: Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury

Facilitators: Ms. Alisa Clarke, Dr. Joni Carley

\*\*\*\*\*

**Observations and remarks by Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury,  
former UN Under Secretary-General and Ambassador for Bangladesh:**



Ambassador Chowdhury noted that while the UN building was being renovated, its heart was also in need of renovation. He traced the path of his association with the UN over 35 years, identifying his initial motivation in terms of how the UN could assist in the economic and social development of the least developed countries such as Bangladesh. He lamented however the apparent shift in the motivation of other persons serving in the UN, to the point where such work was now “just a job” for which one was paid, with enthusiasm particularly dwindling among the younger staff and with older staff losing some of their original motivation. In his estimation, work for the UN was no longer set against the backdrop of service to humanity, but that in its efforts to be efficient, the UN had lost its soul. Much of its soul is captured in the UN Charter, and one could be re-energized through reading it. The current situation does not augur well for the UN.

Ambassador Chowdhury suggested several approaches to creating a change based on the values enunciated in the UN Charter:

- *With respect to the UN system and culture*
  - The current recruitment system, now archaic and frivolous and with an oath based on rules rather than the essence of the UN, does not necessarily ensure a good international civil servant. It could be made more relevant by including a screening question for potential recruits such as “Why do you think you are the right person for the UN?” There should also be greater diversity among staff.
  - The current culture of entitlement should be replaced with one of dedication, based on being seen as an opportunity to serve humanity
- *With respect to Member States*
  - The UN secretariat tends to be insensitive to the situation in the beneficiary countries themselves, and a more values-based approach to assessing and assisting these countries should be applied
- *With respect to civil society*
  - The UN secretariat is not trained or equipped to deal with NGOs, and must learn to see them as partners, who, in many cases, represent the cause of the common people, and to develop a positive culture in this regard
- *With respect to internal staff interactions*
  - Staff at all levels, but especially at the junior level, should have the opportunity to interact with the leadership and management face to face. Time for open-hearted discussion should be built into the programmes of USGs and other senior staff to allow for communication, and the free flow of ideas, creativity and encouragement. Management is otherwise too detached from its own staff, and come under undue influence from Member State and other delegates who are given priority opportunity to meet with them.
  - Leaders should discuss values and their application regularly, whereas it is currently not required of them, and management does not undertake such efforts beyond their usual duties.

As his overarching and final comment, the Ambassador advised that for a change towards a positive culture in the system one should start with oneself first.

\*\*\*\*\*

The workshop segment was separated into several exercises:

**In “Vision quest: a positive culture”:**

Participants were invited to take a moment to remind themselves what brought them to work in the international community and to reconnect with that spark of enthusiasm. The facilitator then asked for each person to envision a values-based system in the year 2017. The different visions were grouped around the qualities of “Authenticity”, “Spirit” and “Solidarity/Equality”.

**For “Reality check: what elements for a values-based culture currently exist?”:**

Participants examined how their experience of the current system reflected the qualities or values they had identified for their future vision. Both positive and negative observations were noted. Negative aspects included power imbalances, bureaucracy and hierarchy, lost idealism, lack of inspiration and the use of language which obscures rather than promotes communication. Positive elements encompassed the effective use of informal diplomacy, the commitment of staff in the field, current efforts to renew the internal justice system and the first “Week of spirituality, values and global concerns”.

**Under “Options and mapping”:**

The facilitator asked for participants to group themselves around their preferred visions and to identify as a group the different options which could take them from their current reality to the future vision qualities. For “Authenticity”, elements involved building trust by modeling values-based behaviour, recruiting persons for integrity, breaking down bureaucracy and increasing enthusiasm. For “Solidarity”, the suggested measures were modernization of structures, increased transparency and reflecting good governance. For “Spirit”, recommended approaches included building time for meditation in the schedules of leadership and staff, and recruitment based more on authenticity and sense of spirit.

**For “Way forward: Me, we and the millennium”:**

The facilitator reminded the participants that in speaking of the international system were are speaking of ourselves, and asked them to choose an option/s which most resonated with them and to identify a way or ways in which they could act on the chosen option, either personally or within the organization where they worked. Each participant was then invited to declare what concrete, practical action they would take in moving forward on their selected option from that day.

Participants could take away their own personal pages indicating their vision, option and declaration with which they would move forward. In wrapping up, the facilitators noted that this was the start of a process and reminded participants that each was an empowered actor in creating a positive culture, again beginning with the individual, and growing through the collective.

\*\*\*\*\*

Some participant comments on “What did you take away?/What worked best for you?”:

*“A sense of deep gratification that so many people are willing to enter into cooperative action for enlightened change within the UN organization”*

*“An opportunity to meet with other professionals associated with the UN system and with similar minds”*