

VISIONARY CONVERSATION

**Dr. Khadija Moalla - UNDP Practice Leader and Regional Coordinator for the HIV/AIDS
Regional Programme in the Arab States**

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For Dr. Moalla, an international system fully reflective of the UN's universal core values would demonstrate the qualities of integrity, service to people, respect for all, and mindfulness about the stewardship of resources. These elements were currently lacking. She noted that she believed integrity could not be taught, but can be modeled through childhood upbringing and other situations, and it was important to recruit agents of change to embody these values. The recruitment process could include questions such as why the candidate wanted to work for the UN, and ensuring enthusiasm about what they bring to the UN, with an emphasis on service, unlike many other jobs. It may be helpful in this respect to hire persons only after having experience of their attitudes and approach over a period of time.

In terms of the presence of values-based leadership, there were some staff members reflecting this. However, Dr. Moalla expressed the need for more risk-takers and agents of change, especially since, with the advent of social media and other internet-based activity, information sharing was more widespread, and if the UN does not act where needed, the change will happen in other ways. In the risk-averse culture of the UN, it was thus also important to nurture and support such risk-taking.

Challenges to the vision of a values-driven international system included multi-national businesses, governments and donors who operated in an opportunistic fashion, viewing development as an agenda to serve particular lobbies. Without a change in this context, South to South cooperation will not be accomplished. It was important for the UN to move beyond being more than a broker of expertise or travel agent, and to have a longer-term vision rather than focus on short-term results.

A key option for the way forward included applying emotional intelligence and related tools through leadership training. Dr. Monica Sharma had developed and applied this successfully, notably in the south, where "People of honor", as Dr. Moalla likes to call them, were identified to make the shift, with significant results. Dr. Moalla cited a project in the Arab states that incorporated religious leaders in development, investing in building trust, through developing relationships with them over six years, and involving them in recognition of their integral role in society notwithstanding the fact that she values secularization highly. This was particularly important for Arab States, generally mistrustful of the UN.

Dr. Moalla recommended that the methodology involve investing in finding the right people and putting together networks of different actors such as religious leaders, NGOs and business persons, with the UN providing a platform for conversations to take place among them. This

would be the way to peace. Leadership would be developed by scaling up the networks into coalitions, evolving into a constellation without a specific head, and applying a holistic approach.

The follow-up discussion covered the following:

- There were a number of persons in the UN who could serve as a core for change. Developing the right cadre of staff involved having a combination of technical expertise and the tools to bring out the best in people.
- There was a general indifference to individuals as people in the system, as was evident in the former UN internal justice system. This was also reflected in the shifting emphasis in human resources on dry, technical functions, especially drawing on the business approach, and which did not require or lend itself to an understanding of international cooperation or the promotion of human dignity. These trends needed to be addressed, and work in the UN needed to be acknowledged as different in nature from work in the private sector.
- In the international system there was a need for a mix of diplomats, bureaucrats and agents of change. As was discussed, there are existing tools to nurture principle-based leadership. This was an organic process, not to be pushed too much or it may break. While it is currently going against the tide, with the work of change agents it would grow to critical mass as well as through expanding knowledge, wisdom and awareness of interdependence via communications such as the internet.
- It would be useful for the UN to involve communities more through outreach, getting people to take action beyond mere talk
- The critical component of change was ultimately leadership, and this needed to be fostered