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The Evolving Role of the United Nations Secretary-General: A Comprehensive Appraisal

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations Secretary-General embodies the aspirations and principles of the international community, serving as a symbol of global unity and advocate for the world's most vulnerable populations. Rooted in the UN Charter, the Secretary-General assumes multifaceted responsibilities spanning administrative, diplomatic, and peacemaking domains. This article provides a historical overview of the Secretary-General's evolution since the inception of the United Nations, delineating the tenure and contributions of each incumbent. Central to the analysis are the core functions of the Secretary-General, including administrative oversight, human resources management, peacekeeping operations, and mediation efforts. Notably, the Secretary-General's authority to address threats to international peace underscores the pivotal role in global security governance. Moreover, the Secretary-General serves as a liaison between the UN organs, world leaders, and member states, facilitating dialogue and consensus-building. Through meticulous examination, this paper elucidates the indispensable role of the Secretary-General in advancing the UN's mission of fostering peace, security, and sustainable development worldwide. Ultimately, it underscores the imperative of collective cooperation among member states to surmount the multifaceted challenges confronting the international community.

Keywords: United Nations, Secretary-General, Appraisal of the United Nations, Appraisal of the Secretary-General, and Secretary-General of the United Nations.

INTRODUCTION

The United Nations Secretariat is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations. It is headed by the United Nations Secretary-General. He is assisted by staff of international civil servants worldwide. The Secretary-General is appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council [1]. The Charter of the United Nations designates the Secretary-General as "Chief Administrative Office" of the Organization, who shall act in that capacity and perform "such other functions as are entrusted" to him or her by the Security Council and other United Nations organs [2]. The Charter also empowers the Secretary-General to:

Bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security [3].

These guidelines define his powers and his office and grant him considerable scope for action. He would fail if he does not take careful account of the concerns of member states but he must also uphold the values and moral authority of the United Nations, and speak and act for peace, even at the risk of challenging or disagreeing with some member states.

The United Nations Charter provides that the staff shall be chosen by application of "the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity" [4] with the due regard for the importance of recruiting on a wide

¹ Secretary-General of the United Nation – Wikipedia, the free... en.m.wikipedia.org/... Accessed 5/01/2023 by 12:41pm

² Article 97

³ Article 99

⁴ Article 101 (3)

geographical basis. The Charter of the UN provides that the Secretary-General and the staff shall not seek or receive instructions from any authority other than the United Nations [5]. In this connection, no state member of the UN should give direction to the Secretary-General and the office must not take each United Nations member state is enjoined to respect the international character of the Secretariat and not seek to influence its staff. The Secretary-General alone is responsible for the appointment of staff under regulations established by the General Assembly.

The Secretariat carries out the diverse day-to-day work of the United Nations. It services the other principal organs of the United Nations and administers the programmes and policies laid down by them. At its head is the Secretary-General.

The duties carried out by the Secretariat are as varied as the problems dealt with by the United Nations. These range from administering peacekeeping operations to mediating International disputes, from surveying economic and social studies on human right and sustainable development[6].

In the injuries case[7], the UK brought a case against Albania suing for compensation after, on 22 October 1946, two British destroyers hit sea-mines in Albania waters at the straits of Corfu damaging them and killing naval personnel during the Corfu Channel incident.

The court ordered Albania to pay UK £843,947 in compensation. The Corfu channel case established that states must meet a preponderance of the evidence standard to prevail before the ICJ.

The Merits Case [8].

HISTORY OF SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The Secretary-General was described as “World Moderator” [9]. He is the administrative officer of the United Nations. When the United Nations was founded in 1945, the founding fathers saw to it that wider powers were given to the Secretary-General. The first Secretary-General was Trygve Lie [10]. He was appointed in February 1946. He resigned in November 1952.

The second Secretary-General was Dag Hammarskjöld [11].he served from April 1953 until September 1961 when he died in plane crash in Africa.

The third Secretary-General was U Thant from Burma [12]. He became the Secretary-General of the United Nations in November 1961 in an acting capacity but was formally appointed in November 1962. He served from 1962 to December 1971.

The fourth Secretary-General was Kurt Waldheim [13]. He served from January 1972 to December 1981. The fifth Secretary-General was Javier Perez de Cuellar [14]. He was appointed in January 1982. His term ended in December 1991.

The sixth Secretary-General was Boutros-Boutros Ghali [15]. He became a Secretary-General in January 1992 and his terms of office terminated in December 1996.

The Seventh Secretary-General was Kofi Annan [16]. He became the Secretary-General of the United Nations in January 1997 and served up to December 2006.

The eighth Secretary-General of the United Nations is Ban Ki-Moon [17]. He became the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 1 January 2007 and his first term expired on 31st December 2011 but was re-elected, his term of office terminated on 31 December, 2016.

The 9th and current Secretary-General is Antonio Guterries from Portugal and he was elected in 1 January 2017[18].

⁵ Article 100 (1)

⁶ Secretariat of the United Nations www.un.org/en/mainbodies/secretariate/ Accessed on 10 Sep. 2023

⁷ ICJ Reports (1947)

⁸ ICJ Reports (1986) 14, 114

⁹ By Roosevelt who was then US President

¹⁰ A Norwegian

¹¹ He was from Sweden

¹² Burma is now known as Myanmar

¹³ He was from Austral

¹⁴ He was from Peru

¹⁵ He was from Egypt

¹⁶ He was from Ghana

¹⁷ “Bank Ki-Moon wins second-term as UN Secretary-General” BBC News 21 June 2011

¹⁸ United Nations-Secretaries General/Britanica www.britanica.com>topics>united-nat... Accessed 14 March 2024

THE MAIN RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations being founded, in this regard, the founders [19 intended that the Secretariat should be a very vital organ. The Secretariat was to be headed by a Secretary-General. This person should be entrusted with great responsibilities. He should be a diplomat and an advocate, Civil Servant and Chief Executive Officer of the United Nations [20].

a. Administrative

The Secretary-General oversees the United Nations close operations, including research transaction and media relations. The Secretariat has a staff of close to nine thousand (9000) people from about 170 different countries. Each Secretary-General has handled his administrative responsibilities differently.

b. Human Resources

The hiring of under-secretaries for approximately fifty United Nations posts, including the heads of funds such as UNICEF and UNDP, falls under the purview of the Secretary-General. An important aspect of the hiring process involves lobbying members to fill posts with their nationals, highlighting the Secretary-General's role of negotiating with the Security Council and the General Assembly to ensure broad regional representation.

c. Peacekeeping

The Secretary-General's office shoulders responsibility for overseeing peacekeeping missions and appoints the Under Secretary in charge of that Department, involving more than 110,000 personnel serving in twenty in operations as of September 2008[21]. Though the General Assembly or Security Council may initiate a peacekeeping mission, operational control rest with the Secretariat under the able leadership of the Secretary-General.

d. Mediation

This function involves the Secretary-General's role as a mediator between parties in conflict. As part of his good offices role, the Secretary-General makes use of his independence and impartiality as the head of a global organization to prevent and stop the spread of conflict.

e. He may bring to the attention of the Security Council nay matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

f. He may use his good offices by taking certain steps publicly and in private, drawing upon his independence, impartiality and integrity, to prevent international disputes from arising, escalating or spreading.

OTHER ROLES OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS

As the Chief Administrative Officer of the United Nations, the Secretary General is responsible for a wide range of administrative tasks. He serves as the spokesman for the United Nations representing and upholding the organization's principles. He has the authority to bring to the Security Council's attention matters which he feels threaten the maintenance of international peace and security. He addresses the General Assembly when the need arises.

a) The Secretary-General performs the role of employing his good offices to serve as a mediator in conflict situation while the Security Council authorizes the peacekeeping mission or operation. The General Assembly approves funds and the Secretary-General engages in mediating between the conflicting parties.

b) The Secretary-General attends the United Nations session, consults with world leaders and government. He engages in country visits to meet with people, stay informed on issues and report on various conditions.

c) The Secretary-General issues an annual report on the work of the United Nations which appraises its activities and outlines future priorities Article 98.

d) He presides over the Administrative Committee on coordination which brings together the Executive Heads of all United Nations funds, programmes, and specialized agencies twice a year to coordinate the spectrum of substantive and management issues facing the United Nations system.

CONCLUSION

When the United Nations was founded, the founders thought it best to take into cognizance the factors that led to the collapse of the League of Nations. For a better Organization that will function to realizing the main object of its foundation was given to the Secretary General a wider powers. He or she is to be the head of the Principal Organ of the Secretariat. He is to be a diplomat and advocate, civil servant and Chief Executive Officer. The ninth

¹⁹ The President of USA, the Prime Minister of UK, the Premier of Soviet Union

²⁰ "Role of the Secretary-General of the UN" www.un.org/sg/sgrole.shtml Accessed 14/03/2024 3:41pm

²¹ The Role of the UN Secretary-General www.cfr.org/un/role-un-Secretary-General... Accessed on 24th Sep. 2023

Secretary-General of the United Nations from 1945 to 2024 have performed and is still performing their functions very well that the world has continued to witness international peace and Security despite the crisis in so many states in the World. Each Secretary-General also define his role within the context of his particular time in the office. One of the most vital roles played by the Secretary-General is the use of his good offices. This he has used publicly and in private, drawing upon his independence, impartiality and integrity to prevent International disputes from arising or spreading. The Secretary-General has apparently performed its roles and is still performing and has greatly contributed to the world peace and security being maintained.

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