

Secretary-General Guterres approves updated UN whistleblower protection policy

23 January 2017 – Approving an updated United Nations whistleblower policy today, Secretary-General António Guterres is seeking to enhance protection for individuals who report possible misconduct or cooperate with duly authorized audits or investigations.

As part of his reform agenda, Mr. Guterres has made it a priority for the UN to have a whistleblower protection policy that meets the highest possible standards, and the updated plan aims to ensure the Organization functions in a more open, transparent and fair manner. UN Staff and management both agreed on the policy, contained in a bulletin that was just issued, which meets best practices.

According to UN Spokesperson Stéphane Dujarric, the major changes include the following elements:

1. The Ethics Office and Office of Internal Oversight Services will now be able to take preventive action where a risk of retaliation has been identified (instead of staff being required to identify a specific retaliatory act before they can request protection);
2. The policy affords protection from retaliation to whistleblowers who report wrongdoing committed not only by staff but also by contractors, non-UN peacekeepers and others;
3. Staff now have the right to seek review of Ethics Office determinations; and
4. Complainants will be notified of disciplinary measures taken against staff members found to have retaliated against them.

Mr. Dujarric noted that the Secretary General has also tasked an internal working group to examine whether the policy on protection against retaliation should be further expanded to also provide more protections for consultants and individual contractors. The UN chief has given the working group a deadline of 30 June 2017 to come back with their recommendations on this.

Until this matter is decided, the Secretary-General has asked that the Ethics Office continue its practice of providing assistance to consultants and individual contractors who seek protection against retaliation. To include this category of individuals within the policy would have resource implications, Mr. Dujarric added.

The Secretary-General is in favour of enhancing the independence of the Ethics Office by having it report directly to the General Assembly, instead of through the current arrangements, which provide for it to report to the Secretary-General, explained the UN spokesperson, noting that the Secretary-General has requested the Ethics Office to urgently examine this

issue and to report its advice. Such a change in reporting line would require the General Assembly's approval, he added.