

ASG AnneMarie van den Berg remarks to the AFICS Annual Assembly
Friday, 29 May 2025

(Words 1415)

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, it is my pleasure to be here today, representing USG Khare, he is currently not in New York, in fact, he is stuck traveling so he is unable to attend, but does send you all his warm regards.

So I will share some updates on the work of the Department of Operational Support (DOS), in the context of the UN80 initiative and also our broader operational work.

Over the past year, increasing financial constraints and evolving mandates have required us to sharpen our focus and to deliver in a more targeted and efficient way.

Turning first to UN80, the General Assembly approved the revised estimates on 30 December 2025 and for DOS, this included reaching two major milestones. The first one was the approval of the OneEO consolidation, which did bring together 11 EOs that are now providing administrative services under DOS to about 50 entities and clients, and therefore reduces duplication and enables a leaner and more coherent service model. The second milestone was the consolidation of OnePayroll, moving from eight dispersed payroll offices to a single integrated global team. This reform is strengthening accountability, improves business continuity, and also represents a major efficiency gain.

In another key area in DOS, in supply chain, we are also making significant strides as we increasingly focus on those categories of goods and services that most benefit from centralized planning and sourcing. UN80 is further advancing that model. A key initiative is the integration of supply chain activities across the UN system, building on our success during the system-wide medical evacuation (MEDEVAC) and vaccination programmes during the COVID-19 pandemic. DOS is co-leading this effort together with WFP, UNICEF, IOM and UNHCR to deliver end-to-end solutions, starting in five priority humanitarian contexts.

At the same time, approved budget reductions, including the abolition and redeployment of posts, mean we cannot sustain the same breadth of activities. We are prioritizing core mandates, simplifying processes, scaling back lower-impact work, and we are increasing the use of automation and digital tools.

Part of this includes moving functions closer to the field, with the relocation of activities to locations such as Brindisi, Valencia, Entebbe, and Nairobi reflecting a shift toward greater proximity to operations and cost-effectiveness. In this process, we are redistributing functions, learning new skill sets, and instilling greater staff flexibility, supported, of course, by training and careful transition planning.

For example, in recruitment, new “tech-assist” tools, such as application screening and talent sourcing, are reducing manual workload, improving consistency, and supporting more equitable outcomes, while, of course, maintaining human oversight. We are also advancing digitization, including a client relationship management system and the transition to electronic records.

While UN80 brings significant change, it is also an opportunity to build a more agile, efficient, and integrated Organization.

I would now like to highlight some key areas of work that are underway in DOS alongside the UN80 initiative, and despite significant resource constraints.

A key example has been the establishment and operationalization of the United Nations Support Office UNSOH, in Haiti, in support of the non-UN force the Gang Suppression Force known as the GSF, and this was following the Security Council resolution 2793, for which DOS was designated by the Secretary-General as the lead department. Thanks to the extensive work conducted by DOS and OICT in collaboration with all Secretariat partners, we met the mandated timelines, we assumed responsibility for mission support services to BINUH, another mission in Haiti, by 1 February 2026 and full logistical responsibility for the GSF, the non-UN force, by 31 March 2026. This included reaching key achievements through rapid procurement, aviation support, expedited recruitments, strategic and policy development support with regards to GSF force generation, negotiations with Troop and Police contributing countries, establishment of medical and MEDEVAC capacity, and ICT services, to name a few. USG Khare travelled to the Dominican Republic and to Haiti at the end of March and handed over his interim role of Head of UNSOH to the recently appointed ASG Ms. Daniela Kroslak on 1 April. DOS will now continue to support UNSOH, with strategic guidance to ensure the sustainable implementation of its mandate and natural through provision of operational support.

DOS, is no stranger to evolving landscapes, and thanks to the dedication and hard work of our colleagues, continues to play a central role during periods of rapid change. This included the contingency planning efforts of last year, which progressed smoothly despite exceptionally compressed timelines, and with DOS guiding missions throughout significant reductions. At the same time, we continue supporting mission transitions, from the UNAMI liquidation, which the USG also visited in January, to ongoing and evolving requirements in Somalia as UNSOS continues its support to African Union forces in Somalia while UNTMIS prepares to drawdown.

We also continues to provide support in times of crisis, including the current Ebola outbreak with many parts of the department directly involved, including the Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health, the Human Resources Services Division, the Division of Administration, my own Office of Supply Chain Management, all working to provide guidance to Missions as the safety, health and well-being of UN personnel remain our top priority.

We have always been and continues to be at the forefront of discussions on efficiencies and improvements in the way we work, building on the gains of management reforms to identify and effect further efficiencies and improvements. As an example, here in New York, DOS with the understanding and cooperation of staff, has been able to significantly reduce the rental footprint enabling more efficient, effective and sustainable programme delivery by entities through the savings gained. AFICS has been a part of this important initiative, and I want to take the opportunity to express our appreciation for your cooperation in agreeing to temporarily relocate from your space in Unitar Building to the UNICEF building to allow for the accommodation of the incoming Office of the General Assembly

President and the new Secretary-General Transition team whilst the renovation of DC2 is ongoing.

I understand you have raised a question regarding the situation for staff separating from service wishing to remain in the United States. We recognize that visa retrogression remains a significant concern for retiring staff who wish to remain in the United States after their service with the Organization. Based on the latest update from the Host Country Authorities in their monthly Visa Bulletin, United Nations staff seeking permanent residence are facing a backlog of approximately 4 years meaning that retiring staff continue to face lengthy delays before their cases can move forward.

There has not been a material improvement in this situation. The Secretariat continues to monitor developments closely and remains aware of the practical and personal impact this has on staff who have served the Organization and built their lives in the Host Country. Any meaningful improvement would depend on action by the Host Country authorities, including administrative or legislative measures affecting visa availability or treatment of the category applicable to retiring UN staff. Based on the current environment, we do not see near-term prospects for such action. We will nevertheless continue to engage as appropriate with the Host Country and to provide staff with the most up-to-date information available, while encouraging affected individuals to seek qualified immigration advice based on their individual circumstances.

I know you remain deeply committed to the Organization and as actually also just highlighted by USG Pollard, retirees can continue to support the UN by advocating for its work with Member States and reinforcing the importance of multilateralism.

We should never lose sight of the UN's core mission - peace and security, human rights, and development - and the importance of sharing its success stories.

It is important to not lose focus of the narrative and use your experience to emphasise the purpose of the UN including all the success stories. Please advocate on behalf of the Organization.

On a lighter note, I would like to highlight as a special recognition for your contribution and a way to maintain engagement with former colleagues, retirees from the UN Secretariat, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS and UN Women are now eligible to participate in UN Language and communications courses offered here in New York and online. The eligibility and registration process details can be found on the UN Languages website.

In closing, while we face significant challenges, we will continue to adapt, through technology, partnerships, and integrated approaches, to deliver better results for the people we serve. Thank you.
