



THE UNITED NATIONS OFFICE IN GENEVA: AN AGENDA FOR RENEWAL

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The United Nations has kept the matter appropriately discreet, not issuing its customary press releases about senior appointments. Nevertheless the international community in Geneva is delighted to learn exclusively from local media that Michael Møller, the distinguished Danish UN diplomat with a laudable and distinctive family history, has had his mandate as Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG) renewed for a period of twelve months from 1 April 2017. This was announced in the press on the morning of 7 February 2017.

We should be all the more grateful to Mr Møller for his acceptance of the one-year extension to his 21-month permanent contract granted by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in June 2015. A proximate Swiss resident, notwithstanding his Danish nationality and British and distinctive US education, he is a natural choice as a local person to occupy this role on an *ad interim* basis pending resolution of fundamental issues of distribution of UN authorities in the contemporary period. That is surely why he was generous enough to return to the UN system from the tranquillity of retirement, when he willingly accepted appointment as acting Director-General of the UN Office in Geneva in November 2013.

This involved Møller's returning from a two-year period of well-earned retirement at the request of the then UN Secretary Ban Ki-moon, after having performed his final pre-retirement professional role as Executive Director of the Kofi Annan Foundation concluding in 2011 (not including the work of the Global Humanitarian Forum). He was no doubt a natural choice for the inaugural Foundation position, having previously served as UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's Deputy Chief of Staff until just before Annan left office, whereupon Annan recognised his distinction by appointing him as Special Representative of the Secretary General for Cyprus. The close relations between Annan's team and those of Ban are one of the fine examples of a seamless interface in the world of international relations.

Mr Møller was extended from his initial strict one-year role as acting Director-General of UNOG in November 2014. According to contemporary media reports, his extension was subject to some protest on his part as to the terms of his continuation in office. He had, after all, pursued an extensive and much-admired career in the United Nations. In particular, between 1984 and 1997 his activities on behalf the multilateral system commanded him substantial public or private respect. He also embraced a series of extremely challenging and commendable roles from 1979 to 1984 within the United Nations system; and also roles between 1974 and 1979.

The fact that Møller remains willing and able to prolong his senior UN mandate, in the face of his prior decision to retire, corroborates his unwavering commitment to the UN cause through good and through ill. No doubt this sense of commitment led him to accept transformation of his prior acting Director-General status into his 21-month permanent contract as Director-General of UNOG in June 2015, preserving his post-retirement position as one of the UN's most senior diplomats notwithstanding his then having well passed the statutory age for the retirement of UN officials of his generation of 60, at the time of accepting this 21-month permanent appointment.

Møller's commitment to continued service is a source of admiration for us all. Since then, his wise leadership and sense of inclusiveness within the international community in Geneva have led to substantial achievements. One such admirable synergy is widely acknowledged to be Director-General Møller's determination to extend UNOG's spheres of cooperation with other Geneva-based international organisations. The best illustration of this is perhaps his cooperation with the International Civil Defence Organisation whose premises he graced with the honour of a public visit on 2 July 2014. He may be the very first Director-General of UNOG to work so closely with that much under-recognised international institution.

Mr Møller rejoined the UN from retirement at a sensitive time, in respect of which his devotion to duty must once again be appreciated. Denmark's most distinguished diplomat and a noted scholar of UN politics, Carsten Staur, had transferred from his long-held post as Danish Permanent Representative to the UN in New York to the more distinguished role of Danish Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva on 1 August 2013. Also in November 2013, at the same time as Møller returned from comfortable retirement to UN office, the then Danish Development Minister generously stepped down from the Danish government of the then (and current) Danish prime minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen.

Nevertheless this highly-regarded Minister maintained his commitment to international organisations and the ideals of the United Nations through his continued membership of the Council of a new east Asian-based NGO from then until now. That NGO had been transformed on 20 June 2012, by the then UN Secretary-General, into a distinctive intergovernmental organisation with a limited number of contributing member states and a panoply of other participating member states whose interactions are worthy of study by legal scholars.

This environmentally-focused inter-governmental organisation initially had offices in the environmentally-focused Danish government nuclear research facility at Risø, along with Danish-based UNOPS and UNEP staff. Nevertheless both this NGO and other UN facilities were transferred to UN City, an expansive carbon-neutral modern complex of some 52,000m² in a suburb of Copenhagen, whose inauguration was presided over by the then UN Secretary-General on 4 July 2013 under the auspices and approval of the then Danish Minister for Development. This inauguration took place just before Ambassador Staur completed his important transfer to Geneva.

Risø no longer exists, and hence all UN, relevant associated international organisations outside the UN system but sharing its goals, and related Danish government facilities have been transferred to UN City under the benign umbrella of a network of proper international treaties and headquarters agreements according the customary and entirely proper legal immunities to their staff. Moreover both the former Danish Development Minister, a well-regarded moderate of sound judgment, and Prime Minister Rasmussen, have kept active and no doubt entirely proper roles in the performance of international organisations committed to promoting environmental causes.

The Danish government has been so generous as to finance the entirety of UN City, relieving the United Nations of its financial burdens at the same time as honourably foregoing taxation revenues upon the some 1,500 UN employees' salaries who are based there. This might be regarded as only natural, by reason of the commitment of the South Korean government of which the then UN Secretary-General was formerly Foreign Minister, to clean energy. That country has some 1,000 wind turbines, more indeed than Denmark, the world's principal exporter of wind turbines, that has some 700. South Korea is well-known for its consistently windy climate.

One of the generous additional duties Mr Møller undertook in his *ad interim* capacity as Director-General of UNOG was to serve as acting Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), a role which he adopted on 8 April 2014. The burdens of temporary occupation of this office following expiry of the contract of the prior Executive Secretary

were mercifully foreclosed when, on 9 July 2014, a permanent Executive Secretary to UNECE was appointed to relieve Mr Møller of these additional duties he had voluntarily undertaken.

This new appointee (also Danish) has undertaken fine work, by reason of his full-time commitment to his duties in Geneva and the breadth of his wise interviews and analyses in a variety of media outlets and with distinguished world leaders. His unwavering commitment to staff rules on avoiding conflict of interest and collateral professional commitments is also worthy of praise. Of particular note were his opening comments at the ITU Symposium of the Future Networked Car. He noted that we can considerably contribute to commending his clever comments upon cars and their capacities.

We now learn from the media that the Executive Secretary's position is to be subject to a vacancy notice and competition, correcting the double-Danish UNOG anomaly. Hence Mr Møller may outlast his Danish successor as UNECE Executive Secretary. It is unusual that an Under Secretary-General be selected for appointment, prior to expiry of his predecessor's term, by means of a vacancy notice. Departure from the principle of meritorious political appointment to such positions is a brave innovation on the part of Mr Møller.

We should congratulate him for embracing such transparency at so early a stage in his renewed mandate, particularly if he has decided to pursue this initiative as part of a broader scheme for selection by merit to the most senior positions in the United Nations to ensure that those who wish to reform the system, albeit in diplomatically well-spirited means and without undue aggravation, have opportunities to do so from the inside as well as previously from the outside.

Denmark has an admirable tradition of environmental cooperation with a miscellany of committed funding states. One of Denmark's most important medieval harbours, located at the narrowest position on the Limfjord, is a superlative example of how old history can press up closely against contemporary daily legal realities. The northern city, attracting devotees of equestrianism even in its coldest months, for the most part offers safe harbour to those committed to the most expansive environmental causes for cooperation across borders.

We are pleased that politicians past and present support these equestrian efforts, connected as they are to the broader commercial and political imperatives of the country's bilateral relations. The continuing benefit of such ever-increasing transparency no doubt will cause many more revelations promoting the universally-held goals of accountability and propriety in the independent operation of the United Nations.

Mr Møller must be very happy with the extension of his appointment. He deserves it, and he is surely doing many people a number of proper and appropriate favours by keeping the ship steady at a time of potential instability when he is bound to harbour a well-earned desire finally to retire. He admirably places duty over convenience. We all support his work, knowing that he undertakes it in consultation with people of a similar motivation.

Møller is widely regarded as one of the wisest Directors-General of UNOG in the history of the organisation. We are confident that he will maintain that role through prudent consultation and decision-making undertaken with committed partners. That will surely continue to apply even if new partners come from unexpected corners. This is why Mr Møller remains a trusted Director-General of UNOG who will surely be admired in years to come, even after his final and well-deserved retirement.

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