

Report of the Seminar on “Administrative Reforms and Innovation”

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Hahn-Been Lee

Moderator of the Seminar and Chairman,
Development Administration Group, EROPA

Mr. President, it is a great honour for me to present to you and the General Assembly a summary report on the discussions which transpired during the four sessions of the Seminar last Friday and Monday, revolving around the very theme of this General Assembly, “Administrative Reforms and Innovations in Asia.”

As there will be available detailed written reports of each of the four seminar sessions prepared by the four rapporteures, namely, Drs. Amara, Abueva, Siagian and Hsueh, I will limit myself to making only a brief general summary around several major subthemes of the Seminar.

These included the following:

- (1) the concept of administrative reform;
- (2) the ecological and political setting of administrative reform;
- (3) the role of political leadership in administrative reform;
- (4) the crucial role of administrators as change agents and the adequacy of the traditional

bureaucracy in providing the right milieu for administrative reform; and
(5) the strategy and conduct of administrative reform.

It was also emphasized that administrative system should be introduced not only in such staff functions as personnel, budgeting and reorganization but also into the substantive program areas of government administration such as rural and urban development, agriculture, education, family planning, industrial development, science and technology, etc.

First, the concept of administrative reform. Mr. President, there was a genuine consensus from the very beginning of the Seminar on what we really mean by administrative reform. In this Seminar, administrative reform did not mean mere change of names and structures of some administrative organization. Rather, it meant changing the behaviour of those involved. Also the relation of the changing behaviour to the developmental goal was stressed. Many speakers and commentators emphasized the social and psychological aspects of the process of administrative reform.

Second, the setting of administrative reform. Mr. President, one of the main highlights of this Seminar was the importance attached to the setting-ecological and political of administrative reform. Political independence was recognized as the ultimate basis of administrative reform. Then, there was the factor of **Time**. Even when a basic political structure is established, there has to be the right time for initiating any measures and for sustaining them.

Third, Mr. President, the Seminar also emphasized the important role of development-oriented political leaders, by releasing the energy of the people, political leaders can create the climate in which innovational elements can emerge and developmental sectors can grow within the administrative system. They can provide the valuable **Time** for reform.

Now, the administrator, Mr. President, while the Seminar emphasized the ecology and gave due recognition to the role of the reformist political leadership, we have not forgotten the crucial role of the Administrator as the change agent for administrative reform and national development.

In most cases it is the administrator who has together change signals from the society and to conceive and formulate administrative reform measures for adoption by his political leader and then to implement those measures. No development-minded political leadership in Asia can choose not to use the administrative bureaucracy as an instrument of change and development. But the Seminar questioned time and again, Mr. President, whether our traditional bureaucracies are adequate for such developmental role. In fact, it was Tun Razak, the wise thinker and

dramatizer of administrative reform, who reminded us in his opening remarks at this General Assembly that, while many of our countries came out of the colonial rule, we were inheriting the same old bureaucratic system. We also learned during the Seminar that the problem of traditional bureaucracy is not the monopoly of only those countries who had experienced colonial rule but even those fortunate countries in this region who did not experience it, —Thailand, Iran and Japan—have the same problem of rigid bureaucracy and the need for developmental thrust with it.

In this connexion, Mr. President, the Seminar has brought out that our bureaucracies are not monolithic. In other words, they are not of just one shade. In real life, the bureaucracy of any country consists of many different kinds of bureaucracies. Even in one agency there are many different parts and units which manifest different degrees of rigidity and innovation. While there are citadels of established routine in many parts of the bureaucracy, the same structure may not lack some “islands” or “enclaves” of innovation and development.

I am happy to note Mr. President, that one of the main findings of this Seminar was the recognition that there do exist such developmental “enclaves” in our bureaucracies and that they should be identified, fostered and mobilized for administrative reform.

Finally, Mr. President, the Seminar gave a close attention to some selected cases of actual administrative reforms in some countries of this region. The attention of the Seminar was focused on the relative merit of two major alternative strategies of administrative reform. One was a limited, step-by-step approach to a series of reform measures, and the other was an all-out, across-the-board approach to a whole range of reform measures.

The Seminar has arrived at some preliminary conclusions on the relative merit of these two strategies and also on the conditions which can assure relative success in each case.

The former strategy, that is, the limited and gradual approach has the advantage of experimentation and confidence building. It has also the advantage of less political interference because of its limited scope. But, before long it has to come to the political threshold and require some broad political support. Unless, this approach graduates itself into a broader strategy, the momentum can hardly be sustained.

The latter strategy, that is, the all-out, comprehensive approach has the advantage of strong political initiative and public enthusiasm. But, often the initial enthusiasm declines because of the very nature of a broad reform. A large-scale reform really consists of many component reforms, and in reality only some out of the many can succeed. When the reform leadership

is aware of this reality and begins to concentrate on some selected sub-reforms out of the whole array, some remarkable successes may be registered with boot-string effect on other concurrent measures. On the other hand, when the reform leadership insists on the simultaneous push of all the components of a gigantic reform, there may develop a kind of cynicism before long due to the lack of visible breakthroughs.

This implies, Mr. President, that the limited strategy has to grow into a broader one, and the broad strategy has to concentrate on several limited strategies in the course of implementation.

Mr. President, this gives me a happy clue to conclude my report. The Seminar has recognized that administrative reform is a continuous process. It takes time. It requires a careful husbanding of innovational forces within the bureaucracy. It needs strong political support. Above all, it requires a flexible strategy in the hands of imaginative and devoted reform leaders whose goal is toward national development and who enjoy the fostering support of the political leadership willing to symbolize the reform effort.

Mr. President the main objective of this Seminar was to bring practicing administrators and scholars of the region together and engage them in soul-searching on their past practices and thinking. In this connection, I would like to note, with a great sense of satisfaction, the resolution which this Assembly has just adopted that reads:

“the General Assembly affirm the view that administrative reforms and innovations are essential elements for national development and that serious considerations be given by governments in the EROPA region to instituting such reforms and innovations.”

Of soul-searching, we have done a lot, Mr. President. There was no dearth of self-criticism. There was a minimum of self-propagation. The Seminar did this all in the spirit of learning from each other's experience and in search of some clues for continuous efforts in our countries for administrative reforms for national development. On this basis, I humbly submit, Mr. President, that the Seminar may have made a modest start in the right direction. In such a spirit, I cannot close this report without acknowledging my indebtedness to the authors of the papers, the commentators, floor discussants and all other participants who all contributed to the Seminar, and last, but not the least, my fine colleagues of the Development Administration Group of EROPA who have worked for months as a team in preparation for this Seminar. Thank you.