

Mexican U.N. Insider Gets Manager's Post

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[UNITED NATIONS](#), Jan. 3 — [Ban Ki-moon](#), on his second day as secretary general, appointed a high-level United Nations insider, Alicia Bárcena Ibarra, to the top management post, a signal that he does not plan aggressive reforms in the much-criticized bureaucracy.

Ms. Bárcena, 54, is a career diplomat from [Mexico](#) who served for most of last year as the chief of staff for [Kofi Annan](#), Mr. Ban's predecessor. Before that, since July 2003, Ms. Bárcena had been the deputy executive secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, a United Nations development agency based in Chile.

United Nations diplomats pointed out that Ms. Bárcena, although a well-regarded diplomat, had little of the front-line administrative experience needed to run the unwieldy United Nations system, which employs 16,500 people worldwide.

Her appointment marked the first time since 1992 that her position, under secretary general for management, has not been held by an American. In years past, the United States government has battled for the position, but this time Washington is lobbying instead for the top policy-making job, under secretary general for political affairs.

Several diplomats said the choice of Ms. Bárcena cast doubt on statements Mr. Ban made on Tuesday, when he said in a meeting with United Nations staff members that he wanted to overhaul "the working culture" of the organization.

"It's a missed opportunity in terms of having a clean break from the Kofi Annan era," said one Security Council diplomat. "It would have made sense if she had immense financial and management experience. But to the contrary, she doesn't."

But the announcement cited Ms. Bárcena's broad knowledge of the sprawling United Nations organization. She has also worked closely

with Mr. Ban during the transition from Mr. Annan's leadership, and Mr. Ban has said he will appoint more women to senior positions.

"He has set his agenda, and I am sure that Ms. Bárcena agrees with that agenda," said Michèle Montas, Mr. Ban's spokeswoman.

The management post had been filled since June 2005 by Christopher B. Burnham, a former Marine Corps reserve colonel and investment banker. Under his tenure, the United Nations adopted new protections for whistleblowers, formed an ethics office, updated its financial disclosure policies and reorganized the procurement department, which has been the target of several criminal fraud indictments. Mr. Burnham stepped down in November.

In the meeting Tuesday with Mr. Ban, Stephen Kisambira, the president of the staff members' union, said the United Nations needed "a fundamental change in the mindset of senior management" from a current approach that he said was based on "dominance, disregard and fear."

Mr. Ban also appointed Sir John Holmes, the British ambassador to France, as under secretary general for humanitarian affairs and coordinator of emergency relief.