

Chinese diplomat given key job at UN

By ZHANG YUWEI
at the United Nations
yuweizhang@chinadailyusa.com

Chinese diplomat Wu Hongbo was sworn in as the new United Nations undersecretary-general for economic and social affairs, at UN headquarters in New York on Monday.

Wu was sworn in to his new role by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon along with Ban's senior management team.

Wu said his priority in heading the agency, known as DESA, is to help implement the Millennium Development Goals, eight goals which include ending extreme poverty, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education. All 193 UN member states have agreed to try to achieve the ambitious MDGs by the year 2015.

"What happens after 2015 remains a key question," said Wu, adding that development issues are still the most pressing for the international community.

"One of the priorities on my work agenda, despite just taking office, is that I will lead my team to help implement the MDGs for the last three years before its deadline and propose a framework for the follow-up post 2015," said Wu.

Wu said development issues have taken on a broader meaning, and the MDGs are now becoming more closely integrated into sustainable development goals.

"Now (development goals) include economic, social and environmental issues. Effectively dealing with these issues will help build a better world for our future generations," he said.

The veteran diplomat also sees challenges in solving these pressing issues.

"There are some big challenges to integrate the MDGs and sustainable development goals because the latter goes far beyond the MDGs," said Wu.

"One thing we have to do is to make sure developing nations understand the integration of the two (MDGs and sustainable development goals) will still protect both their interests and the interests of the least developed countries," said Wu.

Wu is the successor to Chinese diplomat Sha Zukang who had led the department since 2007. Sha recently chaired the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, where more than 190 countries agreed on a plan to achieve a set of sustainable development goals and to promote a global "green economy".

Zhu Zhiqun, professor of political science and international relations at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, said Wu is "fully qualified and competent" for this role because of his diverse background serving as an ambassador to both developed nations, such as Germany, and developing nations, such as the Philippines, in addition to working at China's Foreign Ministry.

"Wu's background and first-hand experience in development issues will be helpful for him as he leads UN efforts to implement the consensus and program plans reached at the Rio+20 development summit," Zhu said.

"Wu's appointment, though succeeding another Chinese, is significant and suggests that



SHEN HONG / XINHUA

Wu Hongbo (right) is sworn in to his new role as the new United Nations undersecretary-general for economic and social affairs, at UN headquarters, alongside UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in New York on Monday.

EXPERIENCE AND LEADERSHIP SKILLS NOTED

Wu Hongbo, a senior Chinese diplomat with rich experience in economics and media, is widely believed to be competent to act as the new UN undersecretary-general for economic and social affairs.

Wu, who assumed his new position in the United Nations on Monday, served as ambassador to Germany from August 2009. A graduate of Beijing Foreign Studies University, Wu later studied in New Zealand. He served as chief representative of the Chinese delegation for the Sino-British Joint Liaison Group, ambassador to the Philippines and assistant foreign minister.

Wu's UN appointment was announced on May 31. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin welcomed the news on June 1, saying Wu is a skilled organizer and qualified to act as the head of the UN department of economic and social affairs.

According to the department's website, Wu will guide its normative, analytic and capacity development work, especially as it advances toward a post-2015 development framework with sustainable development at its core.

During a diplomatic career that spanned more than three decades, Wu, 60, maintained open and effective communications with media worldwide to promote China's stance on a number of issues, including economic cooperation.

But when speaking about his new mission, Wu described himself as "a small fish in a big pond".

"When you are working in the UN headquarters in New York and representing 193 countries in the world community, you realize how challenging the job is," Wu said at his farewell reception, according to the website of the Chinese embassy in Germany.

Despite Wu's modesty, Zhang Xia'an, vice-president of the United Nations Associations of China, said Wu has outstanding leadership skills to accomplish his new goals. "It is essential for the UN undersecretary-general to have good leadership skills, and I'm sure that Wu has the ability."

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China will continue to have a voice at key international organizations as China becomes a major player in international politics and economics," said Zhu. "In fact, the World Bank, the IMF, the WHO and other international organizations are likely to have more Chinese faces at the top leadership level in the future."

The Chinese diplomat has

more than 30 years of high level experience, including close collaboration in international conferences and with multilateral organizations, and has been involved in China's contribution to the implementation of the UN Conventions on Environment and Development as well as China's report on its progress toward the MDGs.

Wu is expected to "play a key

role in working with member states in formulating the UN Development Agenda beyond 2015," said a statement on the UN website after Wu's appointment was announced in May.

Wu said it is quite a transition for him personally to shift from being a Chinese diplomat to an international civil servant to serve the UN.

"In my previous jobs, my col-

leagues were all Chinese, but now I have colleagues from different parts of the world," said Wu.

"The goal of my work changes, too — it changes from serving my country to serving the international community, which of course includes protecting the interests of China," he said.

"There is no conflict between the two."

China's best play a part on international stage

By CHENG GUANGJIN
chengguangjin@chinadaily.com.cn

More Chinese than ever are holding key positions in international organizations in recent years, broadening developing countries' influence on the world stage.

The latest example is Wu Hongbo, former Chinese ambassador to Germany, who was appointed in late May as undersecretary-general for economic and social affairs in the United Nations, replacing Sha Zukang, another Chinese official. Sha had held the position since February 2007.

Before Wu and Sha, Chen Jian was undersecretary-general for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Service of the UN from 2001 to 2007.

Undersecretary-general is the highest position in the UN that can be held by a Chinese citizen, as there is a rule that the UN secretary-general cannot come from the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

The changes in their areas of responsibility reflect the rise of China's national strength and international influence, said Zhang Yi, deputy director of the Secretariat of the United Nations Association of China.

Chinese officials bring to the table their experience in economic development and



Wu Hongbo, UN undersecretary-general for economic and social affairs



Zhu Min, deputy managing director of International Monetary Fund



Margaret Chan, director-general of World Health Organization



Yu Zaiping, vice-president of International Olympic Committee



Zhao Houlin, deputy secretary-general of International Telecommunication Union



He Changchui, deputy director-general of Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN

addressing the needs of a developing country, adding to the variety and efficiency of international organizations, Zhang said.

In recent years, more Chinese officials have held key positions at international organizations.

In 2011, Zhu Min became the first Chinese to hold the position of deputy managing director of the International Monetary Fund, and Justin Yifu Lin just concluded a four-year term as World Bank chief economist and senior vice-president in June.

Statistics from the UN show that in 2011 China contributed \$74.9 million to the organization's annual budget — the eighth most among the 193 UN members.

China currently has less than 500 staff at the UN Secretariat, which is the fewest among the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and fewer than UN members such as Pakistan and Japan, Zhang told China Daily.

The number of UN staff allowed for each member country is determined using a formula that includes demographics and GDP, with budget contributions being a decisive factor.

Holding key positions at international organizations "increases China's voice on the world stage and helps China win more rights in international organizations," said Jin Canrong, deputy dean of the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China.

With the exception of Margaret Chan, director-general of the World Health Organization from Hong Kong, and Wu Jianmin, who was elected president of the International Exhibitions Bureau in 2003, Jin noted that the total number of Chinese officials in decision-making positions at international organizations still lags behind other countries such as India and Japan.

"The increase in the number of high-level Chinese officials

in international organizations cannot match the growth of China's national strength, which is likely to harm China's national interests in future, as China contributes an increasing amount of money to these international organizations but still lacks power in decision making," Jin said.

"A country's international position is not only reflected by its own national strength, but also the degree of acceptance by the world," Jin said. "One of the indicators is its participation in international organizations."

The largest difficulty for Chinese citizens working in international organizations is cultural differences, Zhang said. Chinese are used to keeping a low profile and are more concerned with the collective honor of a group, while their Western counterparts are aggressive and highlight personal values, Zhang said. Zhang and Jin said most Chinese staff at international organizations are placed in low-level positions.

The inability to master multiple languages also keeps most Chinese from standing out in the competition to become an international civil servant, Jin said. "Some government departments, which have talents fit for the requirements of international organizations, should let them go instead of hanging on to them," Jin said.

China urgently needs to train more qualified professionals as reserve forces to work in international organizations, Zhang said.

In 2011, the United Nations Association of China and the department of international cooperation at the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security began co-hosting a training program for international civil servants.

Sponsored by China Ocean Shipping Company, the program has had more than 200 participants in the last two years, mostly university students.

The eight-day program includes an introduction to the

Working together will make the world go round

By CHENG GUANGJIN
chengguangjin@chinadaily.com.cn

As the UN begins to pay more attention to developing countries, China — the world's largest developing country — has called for a bigger say for them in international organizations, and achieving mutual development through cooperation.

Speaking to the Fifth Ministerial Conference of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, held in July in Beijing, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon highlighted the importance of continuous South-South cooperation, adding that strong ties between developing countries are essential for global economic growth.

"North-South cooperation commitments must be met to advance development. South-South cooperation is an increasingly important part of this," Ban said.

The UN chief emphasized that South-South cooperation is especially important given the current economic climate, as the global economic slowdown and the European sovereign-debt crisis adversely affect traditional donor support in many countries.

While meeting with Vice-President Xi Jinping ahead of the conference, Ban spoke highly of China's efforts in helping African countries and promoting global sustainable development.

As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and the largest developing country, China has also been actively supporting the development of the least-developed countries, or LDCs.

Speaking at a high-level meeting dedicated to LDCs on the sidelines of the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development, held in Brazil in June, Premier Wen Jiabao noted that supporting LDCs has been a long-term policy for China, and China will continue to help those nations in their economic and social development as well as their sustainable growth.

China has also, on many occasions, called for more representation for developing countries within the UN Security Council.

Since the late 1990s, there have been many calls for reform of the UN. Reform of the UN Security Council encompasses issues that include regional representation and a possible larger council.

Wang Min, Chinese deputy permanent representative to the UN, told a General Assembly plenary meeting on the reform of the Security Council in November 2011 that the Security Council reform should "give priority to increasing the representation of developing countries, those in Africa in particular."

"The reform should offer more opportunities to more countries, particularly small and medium-sized countries, to serve in the Security Council on a rotating basis to participate in its decision-making process," Wang added.

Hong Pingfan, chief of global economic monitoring in the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs, was quoted by Xinhua News Agency as saying: "As a developing country itself, China has been playing a big role in stabilizing world economy and helping the poor developing countries."