

U.N. Creates Office To Hunt Corruption

Egyptian Chosen in Response to U.S. Call

By Julia Preston
Special to The Washington Post

UNITED NATIONS, Aug. 23—The United Nations, responding to pressure from the United States to reform its huge bureaucracy, for the first time has named a high-level corruption investigator, U.N. officials said today.

Mohamed Aly Niazi, an Egyptian accountant who formerly served as the United Nations's top internal audit official, has been appointed to fill the job starting Sept. 1. He will have the title of assistant secretary general for inspections and investigations and will report directly to U.N. Secretary General Boutros-Ghali, who created the new post. He will be aided by a staff of about 90.

A formal announcement of Niazi's appointment will be made Tuesday.

U.N. officials said the new position is temporary. At its session opening in the fall of 1994, they said, the General Assembly will be asked to establish an even higher-level, permanent position with broader investigative powers.

"We want to set a track record for tough investigations that get results," said Melissa Wells, an American who is the U.N. under-secretary general for administration.

The United States, by far the biggest contributor to the U.N. budget, has long been calling for the world body to create an inspector general position similar to that of many U.S. government agencies, including the State Department. Dick Thornburgh, the former Pennsylvania governor and U.S. attorney general who served for a year as the head of U.N. administration during the presidency of George Bush, recommended the measure in March, at the end of his tenure, in a withering report about U.N. waste and mismanagement.

Madeleine K. Albright, U.S. am-

bassador to the United Nations, has taken up the theme in recent speeches, giving new details about U.N. administrative problems.

The United Nations employs about 15,000 people worldwide.

By U.N. accounts, the United States is \$786 million behind on its regular and peace-keeping dues, more than any other nation. The Clinton administration has pledged to strengthen its cooperation with the United Nations, and U.S. officials told Boutros-Ghali that the creation of an independent oversight office would be a sign to congressional critics that the United Nations is taking steps to reform.

"We welcome this change in the way the United Nations does business," said James P. Rubin, the spokesman for the U.S. mission here. Both Rubin and Wells emphasized that there had been no agreement between the United States and Boutros-Ghali regarding the new office.

The new official will not be called an "inspector general," as he might be in the United States, because of objections to the term from many French-speaking nations where an "inspector" is a policeman.

Boutros-Ghali's decision was influenced by an investigation still underway into alleged irregularities in bidding for helicopter contracts for U.N. peace-keeping operations. Eight top U.N. procurement officers remain suspended in the complicated case, which had lowered morale among U.N. staffers who believed the United Nations was poorly equipped to conduct a fair inquiry. Niazi, a retired U.N. auditor, has been leading that investigation under contract.

Niazi has the strong backing of Boutros-Ghali, also an Egyptian. He had a 23-year U.N. career before he retired in 1987. He will leave retirement to take the new job and will not continue to draw a pension, Wells said. She described Niazi as "obsessed with honesty."