**U.N. Scrambles Over Remarks**

Senior Official from China Voiced Dislike for Americans and Ban Ki-moon

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United Nations diplomats Sunday worked to avert a row over remarks by a high-ranking U.N. official from China who expressed his dislike of Americans and his boss, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

Sha Zukang, the U.N.'s undersecretary-general for economic and social affairs, speaking at a meeting in Austria earlier this month, said "I don't really like Americans," and told Mr. Ban, who was present, "I never liked you, either," according to U.N. officials.

The officials said Mr. Sha, a famously outspoken advocate for China who was previously Beijing's U.N. ambassador, appeared to be drunk at the time. Mr. Sha has since apologized to Mr. Ban, said one U.N. official.

"The matter is resolved and we are not taking up any further action," the official said. Mr. Sha couldn't be reached for comment over the weekend.

Still, some senior U.N. officials said they were worried about Mr. Sha's credibility ahead of a global conference on sustainable development to be held in Rio de Janeiro in 2012. Mr. Sha is in charge of the conference, for which preliminary diplomatic preparations have begun. "There were concerns about him heading this even before this incident," said one official.

Mr. Sha's remarks come at an especially tense time in relations between the U.S. and China. And they could revive concerns among some in the U.S. about anti-American sentiment at the U.N. ahead of the organization's annual General Assembly session, which starts this month.

Washington shrugged off Mr. Sha's comments over the weekend. "We don't take it personally," State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said Sunday. "He seems to be cranky at lots of folks. It will not affect our relations with China."

Ties between Washington and Beijing are strained on a range of issues, from China's foreign-exchange policy to U.S. military strategy in Asia. The U.S. Congress is to hold hearings on China's currency policy this week. Critics say China is giving its exporters an unfair advantage and making U.S. unemployment worse by not allowing its currency to appreciate significantly.

Mr. Sha, 62 years old, has gained a reputation in diplomatic circles for speaking bluntly, at times in ways that appear designed to be provocative. While his style is unusual for Chinese officialdom, his views are in line with those of a sizeable portion of the Chinese establishment that believes Beijing should be more assertive on the world stage.

In the 1990s, when Mr. Sha was China's chief arms-control negotiator, he was well-known for rude remarks, often aimed at the U.S. in off-the-record briefings for foreign reporters in Beijing. In a 2006 interview with the British Broadcasting Corp., he blasted the U.S. after then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld criticized Chinese military spending.

"It's better for the U.S. to shut up. Keep quiet. It's much, much better," said Mr. Sha, at the time China's ambassador at the U.N. "It's high time to shut up."

Mr. Sha's most recent remarks came at a gathering of U.N. officials in Alpbach, Austria, earlier this month. There, he said of Robert Orr, assistant U.N. secretary-general for policy coordination and strategic planning: "I really don't like him. He's an American and I really don't like Americans."

But Mr. Sha then tempered his remarks by praising Mr. Orr for a speech he gave at the Copenhagen climate change conference earlier this year.

Mr. Sha then singled out Mr. Ban, the U.N. secretary-general. "I know you never liked me, Mr. Secretary-General," he said. "Well, I never liked you, either." He softened his tone later, saying he had reluctantly come to admire the U.N. and some things about Mr. Ban.

Mr. Sha's remarks were reported by Foreign Policy magazine and the Washington Post and confirmed by U.N. officials.

U.N. officials said Mr. Ban considered the matter closed. They said he wouldn't dismiss Mr. Sha unless pressed to do so by the Chinese government. Chinese officials in Beijing and New York couldn't be reached for comment over the weekend. A U.N. official said Mr. Ban's close aides had been in touch with Chinese officials about the incident.

*—Jason Dean in Beijing contributed to this article.*