



General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/C.5/38/40
7 November 1983

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-eighth session
FIFTH COMMITTEE
Agenda item 117

UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM: REPORT OF THE
INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

Comments by the Co-ordinating Committee for Independent Staff
Unions and Associations of the United Nations System

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General transmits herewith for consideration by the Fifth Committee a document submitted by the Co-ordinating Committee for Independent Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System (CCISUA). This document has been presented pursuant to the decision taken by the Fifth Committee at its 28th meeting, on 4 November 1983.

REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

Comments by the Co-ordinating Committee for Independent Staff
Unions and Associations of the United Nations System

1. The Co-ordinating Committee for Independent Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System (CCISUA) welcomes this opportunity to bring to the attention of the Fifth Committee some comments with respect to the agenda item entitled "Report of the International Civil Service Commission". In this, the first such report of the CCISUA an attempt will be made to highlight some major issues. It is hoped that these views may be further amplified by allowing a representative to introduce the report at the appropriate time.

The consultation process

2. In dealing with all issues affecting conditions of service of the staff the major concern of the Co-ordinating Committee is in ensuring a healthy and productive consultative process reflecting the tripartite nature of the system. To this end the CCISUA wishes to indicate its appreciation to the International Civil Service Commission for its decision regarding staff participation and in particular for its invitation to CCISUA to participate fully in its eighteenth and subsequent sessions.

3. In order to render this consultative process more meaningful we urge its extension to the working level of the Commission's secretariat where the formulation of policy and analysis of data would benefit greatly from a preliminary exchange of views. In addition some thought should be given to an expansion of the current composition of the Commission to include direct participation and membership for representatives of staff and administration, similar to the composition of the Pension Board.

The common system

4. From its inception the mandate of the ICSC has been to establish a common, unified approach to conditions of service throughout the system. While recognizing that in a system as diverse as the present one there will always be a need for flexibility, the CCISUA is nevertheless alarmed at what it perceives as a lack of willingness to adhere to common standards and principles in some quarters. The tendency to view each component as semi-autonomous and independent has resulted not only in confusion but also in serious inequities. Administrative decentralization in the interest of greater efficiency must be balanced by adherence to common principles and reaffirmation of the role and authority of centralized decision-making if the common system as we know it is to survive.

Human resources planning

5. The need for a common approach to the utilization of human resources was noted in General Assembly resolution 37/126 which called for integrated personnel management to assist organizations in achieving their objectives and in providing for better utilization of staff expertise. The starting point for such an approach is through the creation of a system-wide computerized roster of skills which can then be matched to the long-term planning requirements of each organization. The ICSC secretariat could serve as useful point of co-ordination in this endeavour. After achieving this technical inventory, organizations and staff will be better able to make long-term forecasts involving greater mobility and enhanced career development. The implications of such an approach are especially relevant for duty stations in the field where staff rotation should be more widely implemented including at the managerial level.

6. Recruitment and promotion policies as well could benefit from a more co-ordinated personnel policy within the system. If targets for unrepresented or under-represented nationals, women, young people and the disabled are to be met, it must be possible to set priorities within specific areas, exchange information and report on progress regularly. Organizations themselves must be convinced of the need for introducing modern management techniques.

7. Part of the Commission's attempt at systematizing personnel policy focused on the question of types of appointment. CCISUA endorses the recommendation for use of three basic types of appointment (short-term, fixed-term and career) and further urges the Assembly to support the concept of permanent career staff who form the backbone of the international civil service. Concern has been voiced in the past on over-reliance of fixed-term appointments in areas where probationary appointments are more appropriate. Excessive reliance on fixed-term contracts should be avoided. In addition the requirement for a probationary term following a period of two years or more on a fixed-term contract should be dispensed with. More effective use of the five-year review in the context of overall career development planning should be encouraged for those on permanent contracts. The Co-ordinating Committee believes that with proper management the dual goals of career security and efficiency can be achieved while at the same time preserving the concept of an independent international civil service.

8. Retirement policy is another aspect of proper human resources management. CCISUA was gratified by the endorsement of its proposals for a phased approach to retirement made at the Commission's eighteenth session. While urging a flexible approach to retirement the overriding concern of staff is to allow individuals to plan their final years of service taking into account economic, social and personal considerations.

Unified personnel policy

9. In examining various aspects of personnel policy the Co-ordinating Committee notes with concern the lack of progress that has been made with respect to reviewing the personnel structure of the common system. In examining in particular

the way in which salaries, allowances and benefits are determined one can only be struck by the many anomalies which exist as a result of the complicated and antiquated personnel system which has evolved.

10. The Co-ordinating Committee strongly urges the General Assembly, as a matter of priority, to instruct the International Civil Service Commission to study the idea of introducing a unified system of salaries and allowances based upon a single category structure. In the years that have elapsed since the Expert Committee in 1949 recommended the establishment of a system based along occupational lines, the present rigid class structure has evolved into something quite different. The time is long overdue for a serious re-evaluation of the personnel structure of the United Nations system with a view to bringing it into line with functional needs.

Conditions of service in the field

11. Re-examination of our personnel structure could best begin with staff serving in the field. All too often those serving the Organization in the field are overlooked and undercompensated because of their distance from the decision-making centres. CCISUA welcomes therefore the attention being paid to this vital part of the system. As a first step it is urged that the use of various categories of field staff, including national professionals, field service offices, mission assignments and local recruitment, be studied and co-ordinated.

12. A more immediate concern for our colleagues in the field is the issue of their safety and security. A more co-ordinated approach to security arrangements, including a centralized security post for the entire system to oversee arrangements on a global basis, should be implemented. A re-examination is needed of standards used to designate difficult duty stations, as well as the possible introduction of hazardous duty pay for some areas.

13. Mobility is crucial to the staff serving overseas. Because of the lack of proximity to headquarters facilities, field service personnel often find it difficult to have access to basic training. One solution is better rotation policies which would encourage training on a regular basis and reward service in the field through accelerated promotion.

Remuneration of international civil servants

14. In approaching the question of remuneration, the guiding principle should be to achieve a fair balance between the needs of organizations to attract and keep qualified personnel and the requirements of an equitable and efficient system of salaries and allowances. To the extent possible distinctions between categories of staff should be minimized and benefits geared to economic need.

15. A review of several elements of the remuneration package before the present Assembly indicates necessary action. In respect to salaries the Co-ordinating Committee urges that a review of total compensation be concluded for those in the Professional category and above for consideration at the thirty-ninth session of

the General Assembly. In addition, a thorough review of the present post adjustment mechanism is called for, focusing attention on the methodology used for establishing the base of the system. There appears to be a growing perception of inequity between duty stations largely due to a undercompensation of the base city (New York) which must be addressed.

16. For the General Service and related categories CCISUA urges that a mechanism be devised to account for cost-of-living changes simultaneously at given duty stations for all categories of staff, utilizing similar principles and compensating equally for losses in purchasing power that occur over time. In addition more attention should be paid to equalizing existing benefits for all staff. As an example:

- (i) The ICSC should be directed to review education costs for all staff duty stations by duty station with a view to reallocating existing resources more equitably for the purpose of children's education. In areas where quality public education is not available, education grant benefits should be made applicable for all staff regardless of category or nationality;
- (ii) The present language incentive should be equally applied to all staff as a single pensionable lump sum applicable to all the working languages of the Organization without limitation;
- (iii) The present death grant benefit provisions should be maintained as the most cost-effective scheme, but the maximum number of months of compensation should be rounded to 12;
- (iv) The non-resident's allowance should be increased for those currently receiving it to one month's net salary, similar to assignment allowances;
- (v) Secondary dependants' allowances should be uniform according to duty station for all categories of staff;
- (vi) The current rental subsidy scheme should be extended to qualified General Service staff and the criteria for the scheme should be expanded to reflect currently prevailing housing market realities; in the long term CCISUA recommends that the problem of housing both at Headquarters and in the field be studied with a view to creating a housing allowance based on demonstrable need;
- (vii) Health insurance subsidies should be increased for all staff to reflect the realities of rising medical costs. Appropriate retroactivity should be considered for staff already sharing an unequal burden of costs due to past increases. In principle CCISUA urges that health care costs not exceed a predetermined percentage of salary and that organizations accept a greater share of the cost in conformity with prevailing practices of comparators.

The independence of the international civil service

17. In attempting to rationalize the benefits and allowances of international civil servants and gear them more specifically to immediate economic realities inherent in the international system, the Co-ordinating Committee wishes to underline the importance it attaches to securing adequate levels of remuneration within the official structure. CCISUA is deeply concerned with the trends toward accepting outside supplementary payments as part of any system of remuneration.

18. An even more serious problem is the increasing amount of interference in the internal operations of the Organization on the part of governmental authorities. Private and official lobbying by Governments directly contravenes the purpose and intent of the Charter. In addition national legislation which aims at controlling or screening employees of international organizations must be discouraged.

19. Finally, the growing tendency by some Member States to interfere in the independent role of the international civil service by actions taken against locally recruited staff must be discontinued. The growing number of cases of arrest, detention, disappearance or death of officials of the United Nations is well documented in the Secretary-General's Report on Privileges and Immunities. The Co-ordinating Committee urges the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly to endorse strong measures to ensure that all Member States respect the work of officials of the United Nations, including their own nationals.

Conclusion

20. While the present paper only comments briefly on the Commission's Report and offers some observations, the Co-ordinating Committee hopes it offers an insight into some of the central concerns of the staff and indicates future directions that might be pursued in achieving a more efficient and responsive way to carry out the mandates of Member States. It is with a deep concern for the work of the entire common system and a commitment to the goals of service set forth in the United Nations Charter that the CCISUA urges the Fifth Committee to direct its attention to the problems raised herein and to continue to promote a constructive exchange of views between all parties.
