



UNITED NATIONS

GENERAL
ASSEMBLY



Distr.
GENERAL

A/36/432/Add.2
27 November 1981

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Thirty-sixth session
Agenda items 104 and 107

JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

Personnel policy options

Comments of the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Members of the General Assembly his comments on the report on the career concept, career development and types of appointment requested of the Joint Inspection Unit by the General Assembly in its resolution 35/210 (A/36/432/Add.1).

ANNEX

Personnel policy options - report on the career concept, career development and types of appointment requested of the Joint Inspection Unit by General Assembly resolution 35/210

Comments of the Secretary-General

1. The report of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) was requested by the General Assembly in section IV of resolution 35/210 of 17 December 1981, in which the Assembly also invited the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) to prepare a separate report after the two bodies had studied further the subjects of the concepts of career, types of appointment, career development and related questions. In that resolution, the two bodies were requested to co-operate in the drafting of these reports and to submit them to the Assembly at its thirty-sixth session. The separate report of ICSC is to be found in chapter II, section H, of its seventh annual report and annex I thereto. a/
2. ICSC and JIU held discussions regarding the preparation of their joint studies. The discussions took place mainly at the thirteenth and fourteenth sessions of ICSC, which were attended by representatives of the organizations which have accepted the statute of ICSC and by representatives of the staff of these organizations, who by virtue of article 28 of the ICSC statute, are required to be consulted by the Commission.
3. The representatives of these organizations and of their staff pointed out that the policy problems requiring study clearly concerned all the organizations in the United Nations common system - a view that was shared by both ICSC and JIU. These representatives suggested that it would therefore have been desirable for consultations to have taken place leading to a statement of position by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) on these policy matters before the studies were completed.
4. As a result of the discussions, ICSC and JIU agreed that they would make no substantive recommendations to the General Assembly at its thirty-sixth session, but would merely inform the Assembly of their respective views and preliminary thinking on the subject.
5. In its report, JIU reviews the present situation of the international civil service which, in its view, lacks a coherent system for staff management and recruitment and therefore has grave repercussions on the morale of the staff and the effectiveness of the secretariats. JIU also considers the present situation to be characterized by an ideological and political debate on the very concept of the international civil service, on which there has been no real agreement. The

a/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 30 (A/36/30).

JIU report then outlines a number of options on which the guidance of the General Assembly is sought. The report concludes that the work on the studies to be made would be considerably facilitated if the General Assembly, on the basis of the information available to it, would provide precise directives and guidelines on the main features of the personnel system which it would like to see developed.

6. The Secretary-General, having consulted his colleagues in ACC, wishes to point out that the questions of personnel policy dealt with in the JIU report are essentially of the kind on which a co-ordinated approach must be taken by the organizations together if the common system is to be maintained and enhanced. Any decisions, even of a preliminary nature, which the General Assembly might take would inevitably pre-empt the development of common policy responding to the programmes and needs of all the organizations.

7. ACC considered that any decisions taken with respect to these important questions should be based on a comprehensive view of the problems and needs of the common system as a whole, so that policies can be adopted for each organization by its own governing organs which would be co-ordinated but would at the same time be applicable within the individual organizations. In the formulation of such policies it is indispensable that there be full participation by all the governing organs and executive heads, as well as by staff representatives.

8. ACC consequently recommended that the General Assembly should, at this stage, take note of the JIU report and request ICSC and JIU to continue the studies which they had been invited to make by the General Assembly in its resolution 35/210, in close collaboration with each other and in full consultation with the executive heads and staff representatives of the organizations in the common system.

9. Without prejudice to the co-ordinated views of organizations of the common system, the Secretary-General believes it appropriate to make some preliminary comments on the JIU report in so far as the report addresses itself to personnel problems in the United Nations. These comments will relate particularly, for the information of the General Assembly, to the actual situation in which the several options referred to in the JIU report have been exercised in the United Nations Secretariat.

10. The basic framework for the personnel system of the United Nations had been laid down in the Staff Regulations of the United Nations which the General Assembly adopted by its resolution 590 (VI) of 2 February 1952, in accordance with the provisions of Article 101, paragraph 1, of the Charter. By these regulations, the General Assembly established the broad principles of personnel policies for the staffing and administration of the Secretariat. These regulations have been amended and supplemented from time to time by the General Assembly to take into account the changing circumstances in which the Secretariat functions. In addition, there has been a large body of decisions and directives emanating from the Assembly which dealt with the development of a coherent personnel system. In a decision taken at its twenty-ninth session, the General Assembly authorized the Secretary-General to proceed with the implementation of his proposals for the improvement of the personnel policies and practices based on the reports of the

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JIU on personnel questions and the major recommendations of the Administrative Management Service. The main thrust of those proposals was the development of a core of career staff whose recruitment and advancement would be based on broad occupational groups. By resolution 33/143 of 20 December 1978 and resolution 35/210 of 17 December 1980, the General Assembly further established comprehensive guidelines for the recruitment and administration of staff designed to bring about personnel reforms, on the one hand, and improvement of equitable geographical distribution, on the other. As JIU has noted in its report, the United Nations, in implementing those resolutions, has taken the first step towards a coherent system. Therefore, it would seem that, so far as the United Nations is concerned, what is required is to consolidate the existing regulations, policy decisions and directives of the General Assembly on personnel matters and to ensure their full implementation by the Secretariat, rather than to attempt to break new ground in order to establish a conceptually more coherent system.

11. In this connexion, it may be recalled that, in his annual report to the General Assembly on the work of the Organization, the Secretary-General stated that:

"As regards directives from intergovernmental bodies, efforts are under way to bring about as effectively and practically as possible the reforms and changes required. Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that the pace of reform and change is unlikely, in the present circumstances, to be as rapid or as comprehensive as would ideally be desired. In this regard, I feel that it would be prudent to bear in mind that there are certain areas of administration where, of necessity, the Secretary-General must continue to have proper discretion and responsibility in order to fulfil his tasks in accordance with the Charter." b/

12. The first option proposed in the JIU report relates to the career concept and its implications. The choice in this respect has been made in the provisions of the Charter which envision the Secretariat staff to be international civil servants recruited on as wide a geographical basis as possible, meeting the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity and carrying out their duties in an independent and impartial manner, responsible only to the Organization. To meet those conditions it is essential that a large proportion of these officials be guaranteed security of tenure and be given a full opportunity to develop their career within the Secretariat. Career service is therefore inherent in the concept of the Secretariat as envisaged in the Charter of the United Nations. The JIU report has noted in this respect that ICSC has also agreed that a core career staff is required in the international civil service.

13. On the other hand, a considerable number of staff members of the United Nations have been on secondment from the national service of those Member States whose nationals serve primarily on fixed-term contracts. The Secretary-General has been able to obtain the agreement of those Member States to permit their nationals

b/ See ibid., Supplement No. 1 (A/36/1), sect. XI.

to have their initial contracts established for progressively longer periods and has encouraged the re-employment of such nationals for further service with the Secretariat after they had returned to their national service. In his comments on the other JIU report (A/36/407/Add.1, para. 22), the Secretary-General has indicated that, while it may be appropriate to formalize the arrangements for the service of staff members who serve alternately with their Governments and with the Secretariat, it should not be done by the introduction of a new type of appointment. As regards other non-career staff who are not seconded from their national service, although no upper limit has been set on the period of service for which fixed-term contracts could be used, the principle has been accepted that the longer a staff member served the Organization on a fixed-term basis, the more imperative it should become for the Organization to consider giving the staff member the security provided by a career appointment.

14. The second option proposed in the JIU report relates to the question of the ratio of non-career to career appointments. The Secretary-General has already indicated in his comments on the other JIU report (A/36/407/Add.1, paras. 15 and 16) the position taken by his predecessors in regard to this question, as well as the proportion that was accepted at various times as the optimum ratio between these two types of appointments. He considers that the decision must continue to depend, in the United Nations, on the operational needs of the work programme of the Organization. In practice, the proportion has had to be adjusted to take into account the efforts required to improve the geographical distribution of the staff. The Secretary-General therefore believes that the question of the ratio should be determined by taking into consideration those factors and the varying circumstances and is not of such a nature as lends itself to be fixed through negotiation among Member States.

15. The third option proposed in the JIU report relates to the definition of occupational groups and their relationship to career paths and recruitment methods. The Secretary-General in 1978 issued a Bulletin which affirmed the principle that an occupational group structure should serve as the basis for managing the staff of the Secretariat (ST/SGB/166 of 18 May 1978). Furthermore, as noted by the JIU in its report, the Secretary-General has established a system of competitive examination by occupation both for the promotion of staff from the General Service to the Professional category and for the recruitment of candidates who are expected to have a career in the Organization. The Secretary-General is convinced that a sound personnel policy requires that candidates entering the Professional category must be selected according to objective criteria in a way which will ensure that they will be able to perform a variety of functions within a broad occupational group and will be able to advance in that occupation. Pursuant to General Assembly resolution 35/210, descriptions of the qualifications required for entry in each occupational group has been published to meet the specific requirements of the United Nations in the areas of recruitment and career development.

16. Among the other problems for which options are proposed, JIU attaches special importance to the question of linked grades. In the view of JIU, the grade linking

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is not necessarily incompatible with the principles underlying the job classification system, but will introduce a degree of flexibility into that system in the interest of the normal career development of the staff. The United Nations has adopted the job classification system and since January 1981, has applied the Master Standard promulgated by ICSC. In the process, it has experienced some difficulties arising from the transition from the rank-in-person to the rank-in-job approach. As a result, serious concern has been expressed with regard to the increased number of requests for reclassification of posts and the effect of job classification on career development of staff who may be required to change their jobs in order to obtain any promotion. It is hoped that further studies by ICSC and JIU on grade linking and related questions would lead to specific proposals that could reconcile the need for well-defined job classification standards and the requirements for career development, both of which are necessary elements for sound personnel administration.

17. In conclusion, the Secretary-General wishes to reaffirm the recommendations of ACC, as set out in paragraph 8 above, that ICSC and JIU be requested to continue their studies in close collaboration with each other and to submit their reports to the General Assembly at its thirty-seventh session.
