



**SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 13th MEETING**

Chairman: Mr. FONTAINE-ORTIZ (Cuba)

Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative  
and Budgetary Questions: Mr. MSELE

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INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS TO REVIEW THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND  
FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued)**

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The meeting was called to order at 5.40 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 38: REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS: REPORT OF THE GROUP OF HIGH-LEVEL INTERGOVERNMENTAL EXPERTS TO REVIEW THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS (continued) (A/41/49 and 663)

1. The CHAIRMAN invited the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission to respond to questions raised during the informal meetings on the item.

2. Mr. AKWEI (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission) said that the Commission had not been consulted by the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts on those matters which were within the Commission's mandate. It had, therefore, followed with great interest the comments made by delegations, noting those proposing that some items should be referred to it, especially those affecting other organizations of the common system as well as the United Nations, and the expressions of caution in that regard. The Secretary-General had drawn attention to common system elements of the report, in paragraph 9 of his note (A/41/663), and to the Commission's central role with regard to the regulation and co-ordination of the conditions of service of the United Nations common system.

3. The restructuring and reform of the Secretariat were administrative matters which were within the province of the Secretary-General. However, they involved some fundamental principles which concerned the Commission. It was not explained in the report of the Group of Experts on what basis the percentage reductions of staff had been selected and whether those reductions resulted from a prior analysis of restructuring requirements, as should have been the case, or from a purely budgetary requirement. In the absence of such analysis, it was not established that a particular percentage reduction would produce greater efficiency in the administrative functioning of the Organization. Given the importance of good management-staff relations and the inevitable effect of reductions on staff morale, the Commission hoped that any reductions deemed necessary for efficiency would be effected after a convincing analysis and close consultations with the staff. It was well aware of the Secretary-General's concern for the well-being of the staff and their best interests as well as those of the Organization. It was also necessary that any reductions should be made after a proper performance appraisal and review of comparative job performance. The Commission had made several recommendations to guide organizations in that regard. No doubt the Secretary-General was also aware of the difficulty of recommending termination of inefficient staff in different office units with dissimilar levels of inefficiency.

4. The chapter of the report of most interest to the Commission was chapter IV, which outlined measures regarding personnel. As stated in paragraph 46, the Commission had undertaken numerous studies and made recommendations on a variety of subjects concerning the management of human resources, designed to guide the Secretary-General of the United Nations as well as other executive heads in discharging their responsibilities. Under that heading, he would comment on a number of specific recommendations. In regard to recommendations 43 and 57, in

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particular he noted that matters bearing on the geographical distribution of staff must be decided ultimately by the General Assembly in view of their political nature as well as their effect on the administrative functioning of the Secretariat. In view of differences in the nature, membership and objectives of the various organizations, the Commission had not yet adopted a common approach to the question, which was still under study.

5. Many delegations had commented on competitive examinations, in particular the level up to which they should be conducted. That had been a matter of considerable controversy in the Fifth Committee and even in the Joint Inspection Unit. In 1985, the Commission had recommended competitive examinations "for recruitment, especially for the junior levels", and also for promotion from the General Service to the Professional level. It could therefore support recommendation 43.

6. The ratio of fixed-term to permanent appointments had also been a matter of concern and much study in the Commission. The Commission had given its view on the question in 1979, when it had stated that a core career staff was needed in the international civil service, the core varying in size from one organization to another depending on each organization's specific needs, and that the determination of the proportion of permanent and fixed-term staff should be made on an organization-by-organization basis. The proposals in recommendation 57, therefore, would best be decided on by the General Assembly. If any organization wished to refer them to the Commission for study and recommendation, it could always do so.

7. The period during which the performance of staff should be evaluated before a permanent contract was granted had changed in the United Nations in recent years. Earlier, many Professional staff had been recruited on a two-year probationary contract, usually leading to a permanent contract. Subsequently, the United Nations, in addition to many other organizations, had introduced a system whereby staff were employed on a series of fixed-term appointments, normally of two years' duration, before being considered for probationary contracts leading to permanent appointments. After reviewing the practice throughout the common system, the Commission had recommended, and the General Assembly had decided, in resolution 37/126 in 1982, that staff members on fixed-term appointments upon completion of five years of continuous good service should be given every reasonable consideration for a career appointment. In recommendation 45, the Group of High-level Intergovernmental Experts recommended a three-year eligibility period without making a case for it. Some clarification at least was needed. One aspect of shortening the period not mentioned was the question of United Nations implementation of General Assembly resolution 38/232, recommending that organizations should normally dispense with the requirement for a probationary appointment as a prerequisite for a career appointment following a period of five years' satisfactory service on fixed-term contracts. As far as he knew, that common system recommendation had not yet been followed up by the United Nations at Headquarters or other duty stations. The Group's radical proposal would need to be considered by the Commission.

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8. Regarding recommendation 46, it should be noted that the Commission had taken the lead in promoting special measures for the recruitment of women and was closely monitoring the progress achieved in all United Nations organizations. Thus, sound recommendations existed to guide the Secretary-General. The Commission had reported on the matter to the current session of the Assembly and would submit a further progress report in 1987.

9. Turning to recommendations 48, 49 and 50, he said that the Commission's current report (A/41/30) and its recommendations on career development in its previous annual reports were very clear. The implementation of those recommendations in regard to human resources development and the needs of the United Nations were a matter for the Secretary-General. The Commission had addressed the question of improving the performance evaluation system for rating staff comparatively and had recommended a format for the common system, but no organization was using it. If, as he assumed, the restructuring and reduction of staff was to be carried out on the basis of merit as stated, the Commission's recommendation deserved serious attention.

10. Regarding recommendation 53, he said it was not clear why the Group considered it necessary to modify the mandate of the Commission so that it could monitor implementation of personnel standards by the United Nations. A question had also been asked whether any inter-agency body was responsible for monitoring the compliance of organizations with decisions affecting the common system. That role was already assigned to the Commission under its statute, approved by the General Assembly in resolution 3357 (XXIX) of 18 December 1974 and accepted to date by 12 organizations of the United Nations common system. Two other organizations, IFAD and GATT, although they had not formally accepted the statute, participated fully in the Commission's work. Article 1 of the statute stated that the Commission had been established for the "regulation and co-ordination of the conditions of service of the United Nations common system". Article 9 referred to the "development of a single unified international civil service through the application of common personnel standards, methods and arrangements". Article 17 stipulated that information on the implementation of its decisions and recommendations should be included in the Commission's annual report. The Commission had been reporting on the implementation of its decisions and recommendations by the United Nations and other organizations in accordance with article 17 of its statute for many years. What was required was for the Committee to consider what action to take regarding delay or non-progress in implementation.

11. The Commission could support recommendation 58 fully. It had stressed the importance of training programmes geared to the needs of the organizations and the optimum allocation of resources, both human and financial, on many occasions.

12. Regarding recommendation 61, which dealt with total entitlements (salaries and conditions of service) of staff, he said that the assertion that total entitlements had reached a level that gave reason for serious concern had unfortunately not been substantiated. Since the basis for comparison was the conditions of service of the comparator civil service, they should be reviewed not just selectively but on the

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basis of total compensation comparison of the overall value of both United Nations and United States entitlements. That would conform more closely to the true meaning of the Noblemaire principle, which had never implied selection of individual entitlements for comparison but rather a general comparison of the conditions of service on both sides with due consideration for differences between the two services. If it was found that the value of United Nations entitlements was too high, only then could measures be introduced to reduce individual entitlements. At present there was no yardstick for measurement because no margin had yet been established for the total compensation comparison; the current methodology used by ICSC was incomplete because it was based on non-expatriate entitlements only. Until the Assembly authorized a total compensation comparison methodology that embraced both non-expatriate and expatriate entitlements, no meaningful judgement could be made about the level of total entitlements. The two elements cited in recommendation 61, namely education grant and annual leave, were an expatriate entitlement and a partly expatriate entitlement respectively, and hence they could not be judged for the time being in a comprehensive comparison but only on an individual and incomplete basis. Some information had been provided to a number of delegations on the history and development of those entitlements as approved by the General Assembly, as well as some comments on certain aspects. Copies of the document were still available for interested delegations.

13. A specific question had been asked about which national civil services had a benefit equivalent to that of the United Nations education grant, which reimbursed the cost of post-secondary studies up to the end of the fourth year or the award of a first university degree, whichever was earlier. The information in the Commission's possession on that question was not very specific in many cases and needed to be updated. For example, where an age limit for reimbursement was provided, it was not specified whether it included university education. Most countries provided scholarships and grants for university studies for children of qualifying nationals, under varying conditions, which were not available to non-nationals such as United Nations expatriates. Some even provided free university education. The United States and many other Governments provided more generous assistance for studies up to the secondary level than the United Nations, in many cases total reimbursement. The United States total reimbursement varied according to duty station and could, for example, go up to \$20,000 per annum. If the proposal regarding the elimination of the education grant for post-secondary education was intended to bring the United Nations benefit into line with United States practice, the same logic should presumably apply to the education grant up to the secondary level, which would mean more expenditure for the United Nations. The Group had been silent on that point. Further, in respect of post-secondary education, the United States, for example, provided reimbursement for post-secondary education-related travel for children of nationals returning to the United States for university education.

14. A question had been asked about the current cost to the United Nations of reimbursement of post-secondary studies. The best estimate of the United Nations Office of Financial Services on the basis of information available on use of the education grant at different educational levels was on the order of \$4 million

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per annum for the regular budget, an amount that included education-grant travel. However, in view of its complexity, the whole matter needed to be reviewed in depth and in context.

15. Questions had also been raised about the amount of annual leave enjoyed by public servants in other countries and the estimated saving from a reduction in annual leave from six to four weeks in the United Nations Secretariat. It would, of course, be misleading to cost a reduction of six weeks leave to four as a pure saving of two weeks per staff member, both General Service and Professional, since it would not necessarily result in increased productivity or efficiency. No doubt the United Nations should be able to provide estimates. The information possessed by the Commission on annual leave entitlements in many Member States did not include paid official holidays, which were considerable in some countries, and needed to be updated. All United Nations salary review committees which had reviewed the leave system had recommended the same leave for General Service and Professional staff. If a new system was introduced whereby the leave entitlements of General Service staff were to be patterned on prevailing conditions at the duty station the amount could vary from well below six weeks to well above. In Rome, for example, the norm was 42.5 working days, or eight and a half weeks. In Vienna, the norm was 40.9 working days, or eight weeks. The policy of the United Nations system had been to have a standard amount that did not vary by duty station.

16. All those rather complex issues affected not only the United Nations but the rest of the organizations of the common system. Presumably, the Committee would not wish to introduce one system for the United Nations that would result in different leave and education entitlements for staff of different organizations at the same duty station, thus changing the concept of equal compensation for work of equal value. Further, in recommendation 61, the Group called for prompt implementation of its proposals regarding the education grant and the four weeks annual leave. Taken in conjunction with recommendation 42, that was a very disturbing approach.

17. In recommendation 42, the Group emphasized its belief that a coherent common system was highly desirable, but it then proceeded to recommend the "applicability of these new rules and regulations to other organizations in the United Nations system". That recommendation raised two concerns which affected the very foundation of the common system. First, the Group seemed to be saying in effect that what was good for the United Nations was good for all other organizations. That was not necessarily so, for it was only by harmonizing and co-ordinating the different practices of the various organizations in the common system that the Commission could evolve a general pattern suitable for the whole system. Secondly, the application of any of the Group's recommendations to the common system could proceed only after consultation with the other organizations. Adopting those recommendations might well, therefore, strike a blow at the very foundations of the common system. The "prompt implementation" proposed in recommendation 61 also concerned the common system. To proceed in that unilateral manner would damage the cohesion of the system. Indeed, the very fact that such recommendations were being entertained by the General Assembly was likely to raise fears in the other organizations that the United Nations might be seeking to "dictate", as it were, to the common system.

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18. In 1985, in resolution 40/244, the General Assembly had expressed concern over actions taken by other organizations leading to disparities in the common system. It would no doubt not wish to take such action on behalf of the United Nations, for the Group's recommendations on those two issues would run counter to the standing instructions of the General Assembly and the provisions of article 15 of the Commission's statute requiring the Commission to harmonize the staff regulations of the various organizations in the common system.

19. The Commission would wish to assist the Assembly in any way possible to review quickly any matters referred to it for consultation through the normal inter-agency process. It would be able to make appropriate recommendations to the Assembly in 1987.

20. In response to requests made by Mr. CHUA (Singapore), Mr. EDON (Benin) and Mr. MAKTARI (Yemen), the CHAIRMAN said that copies of the statement of the Chairman of ICSC would be available, in English only, for delegations.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.