



Secretariat

ST/IC/82/13  
26 February 1982

To: Members of the staff

From: The Assistant Secretary-General  
for Personnel Services

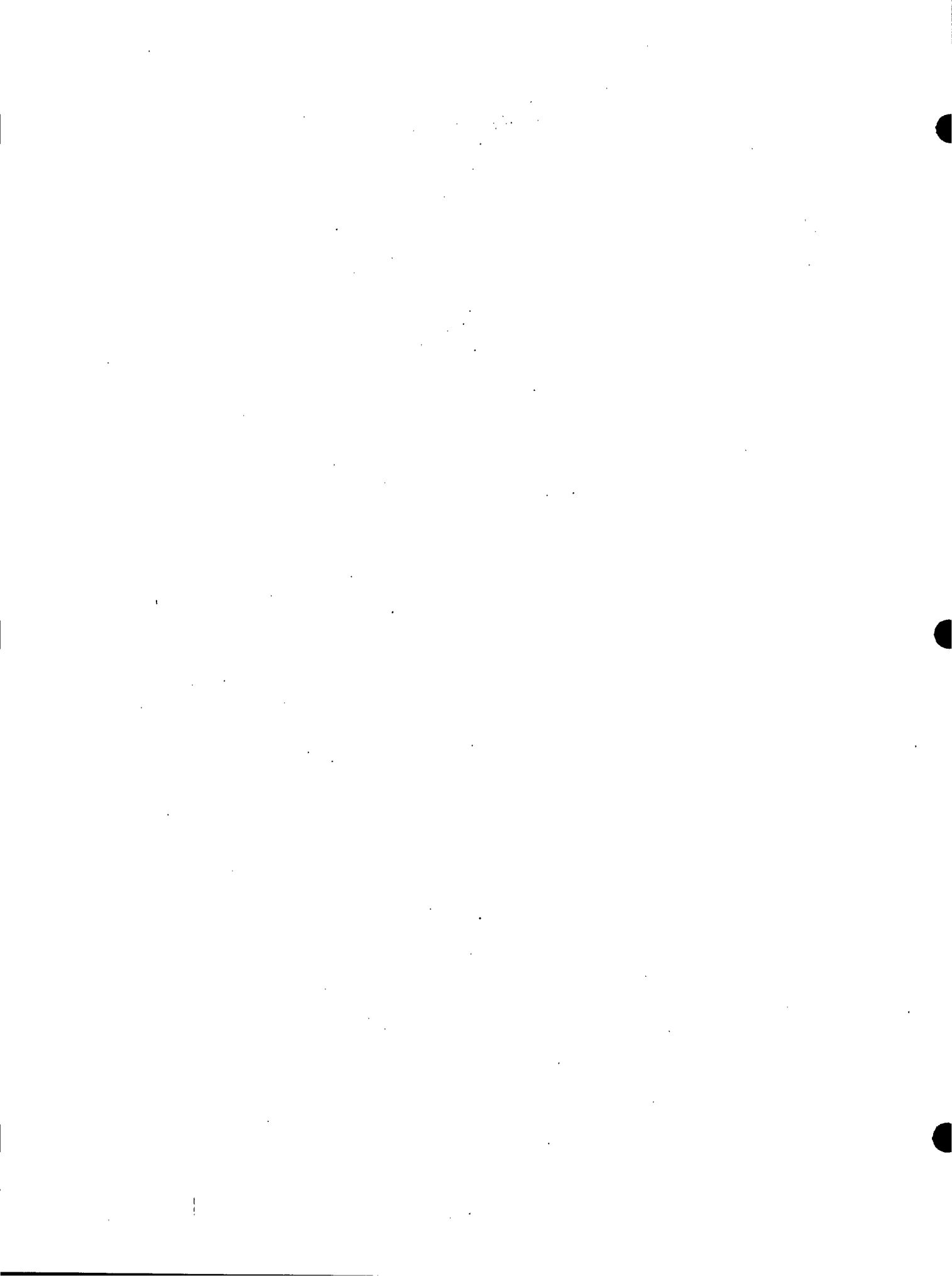
Subject: STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

1. In his first address to the staff at Headquarters, on 12 January 1982, the Secretary-General stressed his intention to do his utmost to preserve and defend the independent and international character of the Secretariat. He emphasized the importance he attached to the maintenance of a Secretariat based on the principle of merit. At the same time, he urged members of the Secretariat, on their part, to conduct themselves at all times in a manner befitting their status as international civil servants. The Secretary-General referred in this connexion to the report of the International Civil Service Advisory Board (ICSAB) 1/ on the standards of conduct in the international civil service and asked that it be reissued and distributed to all staff members as a guide in their daily work.

2. I am, accordingly, forwarding to each member of the Secretariat the text of the Secretary-General's address to the staff at Headquarters, which is annexed, and a copy of the ICSAB report. I hope that its reissuance at the present time will, as indicated in its foreward, "contribute to improved understanding of the status and obligations of the international civil service" and will serve to strengthen our common commitment to the attainment of high standards of performance and conduct in our service to the Organization.

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1/ ICSAB was replaced by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC).



Annex

## SECRETARY-GENERAL'S ADDRESS TO HEADQUARTERS STAFF ON 12 JANUARY 1982

I thank you all for coming here. I did not wish to postpone this meeting until after I had time to go around your offices. In me, you are meeting a person who is by no means new to the Organization. If there is one distinction I can readily claim for myself as compared to my predecessors, it consists of my having been one of you. I can thus easily identify myself with your interests and concerns.

In assuming my new functions, I intend to devote more time and attention to my role as Chief Administrative Officer of the Organization, and I perceive the strengthening of the Secretariat as the first order of business. In this context, I realize the necessity of quiet and continuous dialogue between the management and staff. I would like the present occasion to mark the beginning of a phase of mutually satisfactory staff-management relations which will be fully conducive to the purposes to which we owe allegiance in common.

In my statement to the General Assembly on the occasion of my appointment, I said that we should together strive to turn the Secretariat into an instrument ever less bureaucratic and ever more integrated and efficient. Some of you may have wondered what I had in mind.

Let me first make it clear that I do not believe in making changes just for the sake of change. Nothing is a surer source of disillusionment than changes which look revolutionary in concept but turn out to be superficial in implementation. In you, I am face to face with a group of men and women who have a sturdy, practical sense, who know what is achievable realistically and who do not entertain extravagant expectations.

The working of a staff as large and varied as that of the United Nations and the necessities of discipline generate methods and regulations which inevitably have a pronounced bureaucratic aspect. That is something we cannot do away with. We need not attempt to do so. However, we can, and should, avoid all those bureaucratic tendencies which result in cumbersome procedures, rigidity and dogmatism. Resistance to innovation and undue stratification are the marks of a self-absorbed bureaucracy. These weaken morale and the sense of collective purpose.

Let not our sights be limited to our desks. Every task that we perform, no matter how mundane, bears some relation to the cause that we all serve: the cause of building and strengthening the working structure of the international community. It is a cause of such overriding importance to the life of humanity that it should provide us with motivation as intense and enduring as that of any human pursuit.

I am determined to do my utmost to preserve and defend the independent and international character of the Secretariat and to resist any attempts that tend to erode the principle. The General Assembly has recently reaffirmed the obligations

of Member States to respect the exclusively international character of the responsibilities of the Secretary-General and the staff, and not to seek to influence either the Secretary-General or the staff in the discharge of their duties. It has also called upon Member States to recognize and respect the immunity required by Secretariat personnel in the performance of their official functions. The security and safety of international civil servants is a matter of direct involvement for me, and I am doing and will do all in my power to ensure that it is not jeopardized.

As part of my effort to maintain the independent status of the Secretariat, I shall see to it that the career service of the staff will not be adversely affected by any considerations unrelated to merit. Specifically, I wish to reassure the staff that in matters related to career development, nationality, as such, will not be considered as a relevant factor. As much as any organization, and perhaps more than most, the United Nations needs to reward merit and put a premium on good performance.

Our right to demand respect for our independent and international character, of course, imposes obligations on us which are stated in Article 100 of the Charter as well as in Staff Regulations and oaths of office. It is wholly inadmissible that in the performance of its duties, the staff should seek or receive instructions from any Government of authority external to the Organization. Conversely, it must not become involved in governmental questions. It is only by fully living up to these principles and by self-discipline that the Secretariat can earn the respect and confidence of Member States and of the general public.

I would particularly like to emphasize the requirement that members of the Secretariat conduct themselves at all times in a manner befitting their status as international civil servants. In this context, I would like to refer to the code of behaviour which was enunciated in the report of the International Civil Service Advisory Board. The booklet containing this deserves to be reissued and distributed to all staff members, so that they use it as a guide in their daily work. We all should take a dim view of any tendency to seek the support of governmental representatives for improvement of one's personal situation or for blocking or reversing unfavourable decisions regarding one's position.

I now come to certain aspects of the working conditions of the staff. Some reforms which have no financial implications can be made straight away. These involve a change of attitudes. It is most essential that we should establish an atmosphere of trust between different levels of staff and that all our dealings should be open and above-board. With this end in view, I consider it important that anything that is adverse to the staff member should not go on a confidential file unless it has been shown to the person concerned.

It is not fitting for an organization like ours to continue any practice which weakens confidence or creates needless anxiety in the mind of any person working here.

Moreover, I am much disturbed by the feeling among many of you that there may

be certain inequalities, such as those regarding entitlement to education grant for children and staff assessment. I promise that I will take an active interest in the review of these matters by the International Civil Service Commission. I also consider it regrettable that there does not exist a child-care facility for the staff. As you know, a proposal to establish one was recently rejected by the General Assembly. However, that should not put an end to the matter. We are exploring alternative ways of setting up such a centre.

I would also like to examine how we can improve the situation with regard to promotion possibilities for General Service staff. Several options have been suggested; you will understand that they will need thorough consideration before any commitment can be made. In any case, the procedures and requirements for internal competitive examinations call for an early review.

I am anxious that the judicial systems in the Secretariat should function in such a way as to eliminate backlog and avert undue delays in the adjudication of cases.

I am aware that some of our rules and regulations are a legacy of bygone times, with a few reaching back to the days of the League of Nations. It is my intention to have them reviewed and to examine how we can introduce contemporary techniques for settling the differences between staff and management which inevitably arise in any organization. There is no room here for polemics or confrontations or for outdated ways and means.

There are several other aspects of improving the working conditions of staff which are very much in my mind, but I hesitate to spell them out in view of their financial implications which may put them beyond my reach. As you know, we are facing a financial emergency due to the present strains in the world economy. At a time when most national economies are characterized by negative real growth, it is understandable that Member States should wish to apply stringent budgetary restraints on the United Nations.

We are required to work within a zero-growth budget. It will need dedicated and creative work by the Office of Financial Services as well as the fullest co-operation of Member States to overcome this crisis. I, for one, am convinced that we can trim the fat in our Organization, with beneficial effect for all. We are all in this together, and all of us will be affected if we enter a financial deficit. We must strive to avert what could be a calamity.

Finally, I would like to share a thought with you about the role of the Secretariat as one of the principal organs of the United Nations. As we are all aware, the concerns of the Organization have vastly multiplied in the course of its evolution, and our activities now embrace virtually all aspects of the life of the international community. The present scope of the international agenda could hardly be foreseen at the time that the Organization was established. Considering the quiet transformation which this represents, we should by no means view the role of the Secretariat as a passive one. We are direct participants in the great historic process whereby the international community is developing a network of relationships bringing its national sectors closer to one another.

Let us not, therefore, even in moments of lassitude or dejection, belittle our role. Cynicism is a blight, particularly when the plant we are tending is the young plant of internationalism. I appeal to you always to bear this in mind. The Charter begins with the words, "We, the peoples of the United Nations". In serving the Organization, members of the Secretariat here at Headquarters and at some 160 other duty stations are working together to serve these peoples, north and south, east and west. They are our constituents, and, ultimately, it is to them that we are held to be accountable. They have a right to expect the best of our services in promoting peace, progress and justice in their behalf.

Let us, therefore, rise above self-doubt and complacency and meet the continuing challenge of providing excellence as dedicated civil servants of the international community.

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