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## Fifth Committee

### Summary record of the 22nd meeting

Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 9 November 1998, at 3 p.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Abelian ..... (Armenia)  
*later:* Mrs. Brennan-Haylock (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Bahamas)  
*later:* Mr. Abelian (Chairman) ..... (Armenia)  
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative  
and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

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Agenda item 119: Human resources management (*continued*)

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*The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.*

**Agenda item 119: Human resources management**

(continued) (A/52/814; A/C.5/52/2; A/53/266, 327, 342, 375 and Corr.1, 385, 414, 501, 502, 526 and 548; A/C.5/53/L.3)

1. **Ms. Salim** (Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management) said that when introducing his report on human resources management reform (A/53/414) at the Committee's 14th meeting the Secretary-General had stressed that reform of human resources management was a process in which the Secretariat must study options carefully before moving ahead and then learn from feedback and experience. That did not mean that the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) would not take action immediately when all the considerations had been weighed. However, some practices which had worked for other organizations might have to be adapted for the United Nations. Therefore, changes would not be made until the issues had been discussed with all the parties concerned.

2. The Secretary-General had consistently maintained that the staff were the Organization's greatest asset. To strengthen that asset, he had initiated a reform programme in accordance with the strategy adopted by the General Assembly in 1994, calling together experts in human resources management from around the world and supporting the efforts of the working groups which had been set up. He had met repeatedly with his senior managers to discuss human resources issues, emphasizing his own areas of concern to them and to OHRM. He had also initiated a communications campaign to reach out to the staff worldwide. The Secretary-General was clearly leading the reform effort.

3. Action had been taken in the past year, and improvements were already visible. The breeze of change was blowing, and staff members and managers alike were taking notice. The Secretary-General had explained to the Committee some of the things which reform was not. She would like to mention some of the things which reform was. It was the implementation of the long-awaited skills inventory database and the streamlining of rules and procedures: the amendments to the Staff Rules were listed in document A/53/502, and several administrative instructions were being discussed and would shortly be issued. It was the removal of overlapping between OHRM and other departments and offices and a participatory process to define organizational core and managerial competencies. It was the staff development programmes which had been established and the changes made in the recruitment system to eliminate unnecessary steps. It was a managed reassignment programme

for junior Professionals with a view to staff mobility and career development opportunities. And lastly, it was the building of an accountability system for all staff, including a simplified performance appraisal system and the accountability of managers for their administrative decisions before the appeals bodies.

4. Some of those initiatives had been discussed before, but action was now being taken on them. OHRM was circulating draft administrative instructions amending the current recruitment and placement procedures and was continuing its discussions with the executive offices on action to remove OHRM from processes in which it added no value. However, as repeatedly pointed out, it would take from three to five years to carry the reforms out. The General Assembly's strategy had established sound foundations but it was now being updated: some elements were being validated and others redirected.

5. The Organization's management culture could be changed only by continued investment in training and learning. The Secretary-General had implemented a career development policy based on the principle that responsibility for career growth was shared by the Organization, its managers and its staff. The provision of opportunities for career development required increased resources. OHRM counted on the Committee's support in that connection.

6. Communication with all the partners in the reform process was critical, and her Office had initiated a debate on human resources management with staff at all levels. The five working groups, composed of staff from a variety of departments and offices, established under the Secretary-General's Task Force on the Reform of Human Resources Management were continuing to examine the five major human resources areas of staff administration. The Staff-Management Consultative Committee had met in Bangkok in June to discuss the reform of human resources management, including some of the issues subsequently addressed by the working groups. Before that meeting there had been an assembly of staff and management representatives in New York to discuss the direction and purpose of staff-management relations in the light of the Secretary-General's reform initiatives. There had also been a number of meetings within the Secretariat, including an unprecedented meeting of all managers at the D-1 level and above convened by the Under-Secretary-General for Management and herself to discuss human resources management reform. Two weeks previously, the Secretary-General, the Deputy Secretary-General and many members of the senior management team had met with the staff to discuss human resources management. In addition, a cyber-forum would shortly be operational on the United Nations Intranet to enable staff to

express their opinions on human resources matters and receive feedback. More had to be done for staff members working away from Headquarters. During the year she had met with staff in Geneva, Vienna and Bangkok, visited a peacekeeping mission and participated in a video conference in Nairobi. That dialogue must continue.

7. It was clear that the Organization's top management was committed to changing the management of human resources. In particular, recruitment procedures must be shortened and skills identification and candidate selection improved; the simplification of rules and processes must be continued; the support capabilities for career development must be strengthened; and the United Nations must offer conditions of service that would attract and retain staff of the highest calibre.

8. The Secretary-General's report on human resources management (A/53/342) was a response to the requests contained in General Assembly resolution 51/226. A strategy for human resources management could not be maintained in isolation. That was why the Secretary-General had established the Task Force, whose report would be available shortly. Some of its recommendations would require further study before submission to the General Assembly, but the Secretary-General had asked her to communicate the main points of the report to the Committee.

9. The Task Force's report contained a comprehensive review of accountability of both staff and managers, stressing that the delegation of authority and accountability therefor must rest with individuals. The delegation of authority in human resources management was regulated by administrative instruction ST/AI/234/Rev.1. The Secretary-General's report went further and outlined a programme for evaluating the performance of managers. The backbone of any organization's accountability system was its performance appraisal system. Details of performance management in the United Nations were contained in the Secretary-General's report on that topic (A/53/266).

10. The Secretariat had taken several measures to establish "mechanisms" for accountability. The performance appraisal system had been implemented throughout the Secretariat and the report on human resources management (A/53/342) discussed the creation of a management review panel. Such a panel would produce a "report card" on each department and office and make recommendations to the Secretary-General on managerial problems. It might also review instances of gross negligence or incompetence. The Secretariat was also moving forward with a pilot programme under which managers, rather than OHRM, would be responsible for defending their decisions against appeals by

staff members. Such accountability mechanisms would meet the concerns of Member States more fully and establish clear lines of responsibility and accountability.

11. The Task Force's report also described the work of streamlining personnel rules and procedures, including the Staff Rules; more information on that topic would be found in the report on human resources management reform (A/53/414). The Task Force described how the Secretariat had implemented the General Assembly's request that the continuous release of staff representatives should be limited to four years. It had received responses from only a few Member States on the issue of their financing of national staff representation and the proportionality of staff representation. It had therefore been unable to deliver conclusive findings, but the Secretariat had provided a summary of the practices of the Member States which had reported.

12. The Secretary-General had been requested to make proposals on a probationary period for candidates promoted to the Professional category from other categories. The issue of probationary appointments went hand in hand with the examination of a career and non-career dual-track system of appointments. Those issues required further study, but the Secretariat would give priority to its consideration of the dual-track system and its review of current contractual methods. Since the number of promotions to the Professional category was small, they had little impact on geographical imbalance.

13. The measures taken to implement the career-development policy were outlined in the report on human resources management reform (A/53/414). Attention should be drawn to the principle underlying the Secretary-General's policy. It had long been the expectation that seniority would be the basis for career advancement, but today careers were not built on a single set of skills and continuous learning was essential. The Secretary-General had stated that responsibility for career growth was shared – by the Organization, by managers and by staff members. Data were now being made available for effective human resources planning, expanded learning opportunities, and increased assistance in career development. The Secretary-General would continue to strengthen the training programmes and provide managerial tools for the support of career development.

14. The report on human resources management (A/53/342) described how linguistic qualifications were taken into account in the performance appraisal system and the recruitment and promotion policy, and it discussed the feasibility of holding the national competitive examinations in the six official languages. The modest progress noted by the General Assembly in the achievement of greater mobility for internationally recruited staff was of particular concern

to the Secretary-General, who acknowledged the advantages of increased mobility. However, the United Nations did not have hundreds of offices around the world, and few staff members could take advantage of opportunities at other duty stations. It was acknowledged that in some careers, such as administration, staff rotation was an effective means of sharing experience and skills between duty stations. As the report indicated, the Secretariat had continued its efforts to reduce the proportion of permanent appointments to posts subject to geographical distribution to 70 per cent. For 1998 the proportion was 70.3 per cent. The report discussed the continued freeze on permanent appointments and explained the practices working against a speedy reduction to the 70 per cent level.

15. The report on human resources management reform (A/53/414) dealt with many matters having a direct impact on career service and career development. A major effort was under way to streamline the recruitment, placement and promotion system. The reform would also deal with the issue of the circumstances in which staff members completing fixed-term appointments could receive a termination indemnity. However, action on that point would have to be postponed so that it could be integrated with the introduction of the dual-track system of career and non-career appointments.

16. The Secretary-General's report on comprehensive guidelines for the use of consultants in the Secretariat (A/53/385) contained the guidelines requested by the General Assembly on the terms of reference for the recruitment of consultants. The guidelines took into account the recommendations of the Board of Auditors and the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). They proposed definitions of the types of outside expertise used by the Organization and set out the responsibilities of individual departments and offices and OHRM. Paragraph 6 stated the basic principles for the use of consultants, but the provisions covering individual contractors, as opposed to consultants, were set out separately. The report also outlined the manner in which the recommendation of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) with regard to reporting on the use of consultants would be implemented. The report was in fact being reviewed by ACABQ.

17. The report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/53/375) provided information on the nationality, gender, grade and contractual status of Secretariat staff. Part III of the report, which concerned the system of desirable ranges for the geographical distribution of staff, reflected the significant change that had occurred in those ranges as a result of the mandated adjustment to the base figure. Part V updated

information on various aspects of human resources planning. Part IV concerned measures to ensure the equitable representation of Member States at the senior and policy-making levels, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 51/226. Gender representation in the Secretariat was dealt with separately in document A/53/376.

18. The Secretary-General's note on internal vacancies in the Secretariat (A/53/327) set forth options for legislative action following a recent judgement of the United Nations Administrative Tribunal which had questioned the validity of the distinction between internal and external candidates and the possibility of limiting internal vacancies to staff previously recruited under the system of desirable ranges through competitive examinations or after review by the appointment and promotion bodies. The judgement made it difficult for the Secretariat to comply with a number of General Assembly resolutions on related issues, would require an additional layer in the appointment and promotion process and would have a serious impact on career development of staff. She looked forward to receiving the Fifth Committee's advice on the subject.

19. The report on consultants and individual contractors (A/53/548) complemented the guidelines set out in document A/53/385 on the use of consultants in the Secretariat. It covered some 7,500 special service agreements during the biennium 1996–1997, which had given rise to a total expenditure of \$53 million. Further details on the use of consultants would become available when the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS) was extended to include data in standard formats from offices away from Headquarters.

20. The report on employment of retirees (A/53/526) contained data for 1996 and 1997; statistics for 1995 would be issued as an addendum. The document defined a "retiree" as a former staff member 55 years of age or older who, consequent upon service exceeding five years, was in receipt of a pension benefit from the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund. The Secretary-General was of the view that no adjustment to the current ceilings on retiree earnings was necessary; however, some problems were emerging in the area of language services. The statistical tables annexed to the document would facilitate the General Assembly's consideration of the use of retirees.

21. The report on performance management (A/53/266) provided information on the development and implementation of the performance appraisal system (PAS) since the previous year's report. PAS was a line management and staff development tool designed to improve organizational performance and to strengthen accountability. The system had

been simplified and new features had been introduced to increase managerial accountability and improve linkages to staff development. In addition, a number of monitoring mechanisms had been put in place. With respect to the introduction of performance awards or bonuses, the Organization would begin introducing a range of non-monetary awards, in line with those suggested by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). Once PAS was well established throughout the Organization, consideration would be given to the introduction of other awards. The report also discussed measures to address underperformance. It stressed that any performance recognition programme must be aimed at improving morale, productivity and organizational performance and must not be a substitute for improvements in the overall conditions of service that would enable the Organization to attract and retain high-quality staff. Lastly, document A/53/502 reported on proposed amendments to the Staff Rules, including amendments to implement General Assembly resolution 52/214 with respect to official holidays and amendments designed to simplify and streamline specific rules.

22. **Mr. Powles** (New Zealand), speaking on behalf also of Australia and Canada, said that the retirement of 1,223 staff members in the next five years would present the United Nations with a human resources challenge not seen since 1945. It would be necessary to bring in new talent, change the gender balance, accelerate staff mobility and train future managers among younger staff. The Secretary-General must begin the task of succession planning as a top priority. He shared the Secretary-General's view that the reform of human resources management was at the heart of efforts to transform the Organization into a versatile body that was results-oriented rather than process-oriented. The changes under way in the Secretariat, including technological advances and fiscal restraint, were part of a global phenomenon and should be seen as opportunities for personal development and for the creation of a culture of excellence in all parts of the United Nations.

23. He endorsed the Secretary-General's proposal (A/53/342, para. 95) that future reports on all aspects of human resources management should be subsumed in a single comprehensive report on reform in that area. That would facilitate the General Assembly's discussion of those issues, which should take place every other year. He encouraged the Secretary-General to continue to make use of international expertise and experience, such as that provided by the Task Force on the Reform of Human Resources Management. The report on human resources management reform (A/53/414) showed that the Secretariat had finally begun to deal with the problems outlined in the Secretary-General's seminal report

on renewing the United Nations (A/51/950), including those of recruitment, placement, performance management, mobility, career development, geographical and gender representation, delegation of authority, full accountability and staff-management communication. He fully supported the direction in which the Organization's human resources management reform was heading.

24. He was pleased to note that OHRM was focusing on its strategic functions while also making full use of appropriate management tools to strengthen its administrative overview. Since cumbersome and unnecessary processes were already a problem in parts of the Secretariat, potential overlap between OHRM and the executive offices should be addressed urgently to ensure that those problems were not compounded. The recruitment process was too long, in part because staff committees were involved in the staff selection process. Recruitment was the responsibility of management alone, and the mechanism for challenging recruitment decisions should be the appeals process. Another cause for concern was the fact that many staff members left the Organization long before they reached retirement age; a study of the reasons for those departures would be helpful for planning future recruitment strategies and addressing staff morale.

25. Although a number of sound proposals had been put forward in the area of performance management, accountability and delegation of authority, their implementation had been uneven and sometimes disappointing. The Secretary-General should ensure that his personnel management strategies were implemented vigorously and thoroughly. Article 101 of the Charter could not be fully observed in the absence of a performance-based culture that rewarded and promoted staff solely on the basis of merit. The tolerance of underperformance which the Organization had displayed in the past could no longer be accepted. Performance management through the performance appraisal system represented a conscious effort to reinforce the principle of merit in the staffing and work of the Secretariat. He supported the Secretary-General's intention to continue to delegate authority to line managers and, at the same time, to implement accountability measures, since that would speed up important processes, including recruitment. He only regretted that the decentralization process had been slow and partial. OHRM should begin to provide the necessary training to prepare managers for such delegation of authority and increased accountability, and should be provided with more resources for that purpose. The system of internal justice was also urgently in need of streamlining.

26. He fully supported the career development policy outlined in the report on human resources management

(A/53/342). The identification of core competencies, combined with a clear idea of the core functions needed to implement the medium-term plan, would strengthen the Secretariat's capacity to plan for the General Assembly's future demands. He particularly welcomed the emphasis on building leadership and managerial capacity, since effective managers must be skilled in strategic policy formulation as well as in personnel and financial management. All senior staff should take advantage of opportunities for further training.

27. He welcomed the indication, in the report on the status of women in the Secretariat (A/53/376), that the number of women at the senior director levels had increased. However, the slow pace of gender redistribution must be accelerated. That should soon be possible, considering that 57.5 per cent of the staff members who would retire in the near future were men. He strongly supported the Secretary-General's appeal to Member States to propose more women candidates from a broader array of occupations for appointment to intergovernmental and expert bodies and to positions in the Secretariat.

28. The quality of implementation of General Assembly and Security Council mandates depended on the training and motivation of the Organization's staff and on the provision of adequate financial resources by Member States. While much had been done to meet the first of those conditions, the second had yet to be adequately fulfilled. He hoped that staff at all levels would continue their constructive dialogue with management and that the process would create an open and transparent environment of mutual trust in the Secretariat.

29. *Mrs. Brennen-Haylock (Bahamas), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

30. **Ms. Butschek** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and, in addition, Iceland and Liechtenstein, said that the successful implementation of the Organization's programmes and mandates depended on the performance of staff, who must be competent, dedicated and independent international civil servants of unquestionable integrity, and that Member States expected excellence from staff at all levels. She welcomed the efforts being made to build constructive staff-management relations, which were essential to the success of the reform process. She also welcomed the new focus on performance management, and hoped that PAS would soon be sufficiently established to enable the Organization to introduce a transparent system of performance awards and bonuses. In that connection, the step increment should no longer be

virtually automatic; instead, it should be used as an award for excellent performance. She would be interested in hearing a general evaluation of the findings with respect to underperformance.

31. She was very concerned to note that there were currently more resignations than retirements from the Organization. The number of resignations of P-2 and P-3 staff revealed an intolerable level of frustration that must be addressed urgently. She asked for information on how many of the people who had taken competitive examinations had been recruited, how many had been promoted and how long it had taken for such promotions to occur. Adequate career planning was an important means of reducing the potential for frustration. The Secretary-General should devote more attention to the problem of reconciling the goal of bringing new talent into the Organization with the legitimate aspirations of members of a career civil service that should continue to form the core of the Organization's staff. A professional career should involve continuous learning that would pave the way for advancement. She welcomed the information on increased training opportunities and asked for details on how the funds earmarked for training had been spent. Mobility was not only an important means of broadening horizons and increasing experience, but also a duty inherent in any truly international civil service, and should be stipulated in the Staff Rules.

32. Recruitment in an organization as large and complex as the United Nations must reflect a forward-looking strategy based on a detailed assessment of future needs. The current recruitment process was highly unsatisfactory and must be speeded up significantly. The high average age of newly hired staff was undesirable for any institution, and more efforts should be made to attract younger people. National competitive examinations enhanced the transparency and objectivity of recruitment for entry-level positions. The number of selected candidates must be related to the number of vacancies in entry-level posts so as to eliminate delays in the recruitment process.

33. Accountability and delegation of authority were mutually reinforcing and should progress in parallel. A reasonable balance must be struck between decentralization and empowerment, on the one hand, and central monitoring and control of human resources policies on the other. She welcomed the improved statistics on the composition of the Secretariat (A/53/375), which were useful for proactive human resources management and planning, and looked forward to the following year's report on a staff skills inventory. Although the representation of Member States had improved over the last four years, one third of the nine under-represented countries were members of the European Union,

and 10 of the Union's 15 member countries were below the midpoint of their desirable range. Meanwhile, 11 of the 13 overrepresented countries were developing countries.

34. The report on the status of women (A/53/376) reflected welcome progress in the representation of women at the D-1 level, though the number of women at that level was still very low. She was concerned about the slow pace of improvements in that area, and recalled the concrete proposals put forward on how to achieve the goals set by the General Assembly. She welcomed the development of guidelines on the use of consultants (A/53/385) and trusted that they would be duly enforced. On the subject of internal vacancies (A/53/327), she reiterated that the Secretary-General must be given the opportunity to recruit the best candidates available. The wider the choice, the greater the chances of identifying excellence. At the same time, current recruitment instruments such as national competitive examinations must be maintained and career development must be promoted.

35. The deteriorating security conditions and the continued violation of the privileges and immunities of United Nations staff were of serious concern. It was essential, for the success of the Organization's mission and in the interests of the entire world community, that Member States should do their utmost to ensure respect for the privileges and immunities of United Nations staff, both local and international, and particularly of those engaged in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. Violations of those privileges and immunities contravened the principles laid down in the Charter and in other international instruments. She called upon all States to ratify the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel.

36. **Mr. Adam** (Israel) said that United Nations reform called for acknowledging the need for reform, planning the reform, carrying out the changes and, finally, following up those changes. In his report on human resources management reform (A/53/414), the Secretary-General had indicated the need for changes and outlined a phased programme for carrying them out. The challenge now was to make sure that the reforms were carried out within a precise time-frame and that their progress was evaluated through the implementation phase.

37. Considerable work was needed to forge a new organizational culture and transform the United Nations into a responsive and results-oriented system. The programme of reform must take into account both future needs and programme planning for the following biennium. It must anticipate budget cuts and the geopolitical changes that were likely to mark the following decade, while keeping in mind the General Assembly's guidelines for equitable geographical

distribution. One of the first priorities in pursuing such reform was the need to establish a human resources planning task force whose aim would be to transform plans from principle into practice, determine how proposed changes would affect the recruitment and redeployment of staff and evaluate changing needs in terms of contrives, offices and languages. The task force would work closely with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and OHRM.

38. In order to carry out its mission, the Organization required a well-trained and creative workforce that was sensitive to the unique challenges of a diverse and multicultural environment. The building of such a workforce required professional recruitment schemes and modern and effective training programmes. With regard to the promotion to the Professional category of staff members from other categories, Member States had a role to play in evaluating the criteria for the selection of candidates, which were key to the success of the programme of reform.

39. While his delegation welcomed the recent improvement in the entry examination and the modification of the requirements to reflect the changing needs of the Organization, it believed that the Central Examination Board should have an additional ex officio member who should be a representative of a Member State. A revised system of evaluation for the hiring and promotion of staff was also needed. The new system should meet the standards currently used in the private sector, under which employers assessed their workers using a wide variety of criteria and were themselves evaluated by their workers.

40. His delegation supported the further delegation of authority to programme managers and the proposal that the General Assembly should review the subject at its fifty-fourth session. Increased delegation could cover many areas of operational activity and administration and could have a positive impact on recruitment and evaluation. The Central Examination Board, for example, might delegate authority by setting up regional examination centres, which would yield a more efficient and specialized workforce with different perspectives and backgrounds while maintaining the requisite geographical balance.

41. **Mr. Gjesdal** (Norway) said that a better system for managing recruitment in the United Nations was long overdue. Administrative procedures for the appointment of candidates needed to be simple, transparent and reasonably expeditious. It was unacceptable, for example, that it should take an average of 461 days to hire a single staff member. While the recruitment of well-qualified individuals could also be assured in a system in which the management of human resources was delegated to programme managers, the success

of such delegation of authority depended on the existence of well-defined procedures and on monitoring and follow-up mechanisms centred in OHRM.

42. OHRM had a special role to play in improving the Organization's gender and geographical balance, which was an important precondition for the delegation of authority to programme managers. A balanced gender distribution widened the Organization's resource base and improved the quality and efficiency of its work. The Secretary-General's commitment to the advancement of women must therefore extend not only to recruitment but also to career development for women. A much more vigorous approach was required to increase the proportion of women serving in the Organization at the higher decision-making levels.

43. The competitive examination process remained the fairest means of recruiting staff at the Professional entrance level. Department heads should, however, make better use of the rosters of qualified candidates and the competitive examination process should be complemented by career development programmes for staff at the P-2 and P-3 levels that would allow the Organization to retain its younger staff members. OHRM should make proposals for redressing the current situation in which the number of staff resigning was greater than the number of those retiring. As part of the recruitment policy, due consideration should be given to making more widespread use of fixed-term appointments.

44. His delegation welcomed the emphasis given to the career development policy, which must include a systematic performance appraisal system and staff development on a continuous basis. The management of staff in a multicultural environment posed special challenges and increased resources should therefore be devoted to training and managerial development. In that connection, the rotation and mobility of staff across functions, departments, duty stations and other organizations of the common system would enhance horizontal communication and would foster adaptation to change as well as personal development.

45. Successful implementation of the reform measures required the active participation of staff, management and OHRM and must be based on dialogue. Furthermore, the delegation of authority for human resources management required full acceptance by programme managers and must be fully transparent to staff. While time was needed to implement a new human resources strategy based on full participation, the proposed five-year horizon did not appear to be ambitious enough. Staff and Member States needed to see the practical results of the efforts currently being undertaken to modernize the United Nations.

46. His Government favoured the maintenance and development of a strong and independent international civil service. To that end, the conditions of service must be made more attractive and competitive. The Secretary-General's approach to the issue and his proposal to review the composition, mandate and functioning of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) were therefore welcome. While the Secretary-General should inform Member States on a regular basis of the progress being made in the implementation of human resources management reforms, his delegation considered that he had the necessary authority to carry out reforms in that field on his own.

47. **Mr. Takasu** (Japan) said that the ongoing process of reform would not be complete without significant improvements in the management of human resources. His delegation therefore welcomed the reform initiatives which the Secretary-General had taken to simplify the relevant rules and procedures, empower programme managers and streamline recruitment procedures. It would, however, welcome an explanation of how such streamlining would shorten the recruitment process. He expressed disappointment at the Secretary-General's failure to address the central issue of accountability in his report on human resources management (A/53/342). Until such time as an effective system of accountability was put in place in the Secretariat, the delegation of authority to programme managers must adopt a carefully calibrated and step-by-step approach designed to achieve the purposes of the Organization and to implement the policy directives of Member States. He welcomed the Secretary-General's assurances that core issues, such as equitable geographical distribution, would continue to be addressed by OHRM.

48. He also welcomed the significant improvements in the presentation of data and technical explanations in the report on the composition of the Secretariat (A/53/375 and Corr.1) as well as the overall decline in the number of unrepresented, under-represented and overrepresented Member States during the period from 1 July 1997 to 30 June 1998. He noted with grave concern, however, that the situation of Japanese staff members in the Secretariat had not improved during the period. As at 30 June 1998, the number of Japanese staff members subject to geographical distribution had been 104, which was well below the lower limit of the desirable range. Of the 10 under-represented Member States, the situation of Japan was the most serious. His Government took a very grave view of the matter and urged the Secretary-General to take all possible measures to redress that geographical imbalance and to bring every Member State within its desirable range before his mandate expired in the year 2001.

49. His delegation would welcome the clarification of a number of points. During the previous 12 months, a total of 2,425 appointments had been made, of which only 104 had been subject to geographical distribution. The latter figure seemed to be disproportionately low, and it would therefore be helpful to have a breakdown by nationality of the 2,425 appointments. Of the 104 appointments, only 19 had been nationals of under-represented countries. Moreover, two nationals of overrepresented States had been appointed at the P-2 and P-3 levels. He would therefore also welcome a breakdown by nationality of appointments at the P-2 and P-3 levels of candidates who had not taken the national competitive examinations.

50. His delegation also wished to draw attention to the long delay which successful candidates experienced before they were offered appointments. One Japanese national who had been successful in the 1993 examination had been offered an appointment only in May 1998. Such delays served to discourage qualified candidates who were fully prepared to serve the Organization. Remedial measures, such as making it obligatory for department heads to accept successful candidates proposed by OHRM, were urgently needed. His delegation was also concerned by the significant decline in the number of posts at the P-2 and P-3 levels that were subject to equitable geographical distribution. Reduction in the number of junior Professional posts deprived the Organization of the new blood which it needed for its rejuvenation.

51. In addition to the national competitive examinations, other effective measures were needed to achieve the Secretary-General's goal of making significant progress on geographical and gender representation. Japan would like to propose, for example, that a number of the 320 posts subject to geographical distribution which retiring staff members would vacate by the year 2001 should be reserved for the appointment of qualified candidates from unrepresented and under-represented Member States. A focal point for equitable geographical distribution should be established within OHRM to promote the achievement of that goal. His delegation commended the Secretary-General's intention of using recruitment missions in order to improve the intake of qualified candidates from unrepresented and under-represented States. It emphasized that authorities in the receiving States should be given advance notice of the posts to be filled so that they could identify candidates for interviews and that programme managers responsible for the vacant posts should participate in the missions so that they could conduct the interviews.

52. The number of Japanese men and women with the skills and knowledge required by the United Nations was increasing

rapidly and many of them were showing a keen interest in serving the Organization. There was therefore a strong expectation in Japan that progress would be made in increasing the number of qualified Japanese staff in the Secretariat.

53. *Mr. Abelian (Armenia) resumed the Chair.*

54. **Ms. Waters** (President, United Nations Staff Union), recalled that, in his statement to the staff on the occasion of Staff Day 1998, the Secretary-General had said that staff security began with security of the person, the ability to go about one's work free from threats, harassment and violence. However, it also implied job security, which was a matter both of having a job and of having a sense of what was possible in the job. In that context, she pointed out that 50 per cent of the staff were on fixed-term contracts and that the most important first step towards human security was to increase the number of permanent contracts. Staff on fixed-term contracts felt that their contractual status was constantly under threat and they were unable to enjoy basic rights such as securing mortgages or bank loans. Moreover, they left the service of the Organization, sometimes after 10 or 15 years, without any termination benefits and returned to their countries where they no longer had ties. She hoped that that issue would be addressed as a priority.

55. The staff fully supported the vision of the Secretary-General on the reform of the United Nations. They were also anxious to transform the Organization into a caring employer. One of the keys to achieving that was to establish clear measures for accountability, which was partly a matter of strictly enforcing existing rules such as staff rule 112.3. The application of such measures would ensure accountability, thus paving the way for the delegation of authority. Another requirement was a swift and fair justice system. In that connection, she said that the Office of Internal Oversight Services, whose intended purpose was to ensure good management, could also serve as a tool for violating the rights of individuals if not properly controlled. She hoped that the General Assembly would take a strong stand to ensure that all staff members under investigation had the benefit of due process and that their rights would not be violated, as had sometimes occurred in the past, by the reporting of conclusions prior to adjudication.

56. Staff representatives were willing to work closely with management to establish a career development policy for staff at all levels, particularly for General Service staff, and more particularly in the case of promotions to the Professional category. The Joint Advisory Committee had established a working group on the examination for promotion from the General Service to the Professional category which could, if

the Assembly so wished, lay the foundations for meaningful proposals to review the system.

57. The staff were pleased that the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, which would ensure better protection for all staff and humanitarian workers in the field, required ratification by only one more State in order to enter into force. She called on all Governments that had not yet done so to ratify that instrument and expressed the concern of the staff for all those colleagues who remained missing or detained.

58. The right of staff representatives to participate in the discussion of issues such as recruitment, placement, promotion and the renewal of fixed-term contracts was being questioned by several departments, and managerial prerogative was sometimes cited as a means of excluding them. Moreover, OHRM had suggested that staff representatives were attempting to co-manage the Organization. OHRM had recognized that the rationale for the non-renewal of contracts should be fully documented and had agreed to prepare guidelines in consultation with staff. However, those guidelines had not yet appeared. She pointed out that, since 50 per cent of the staff were on fixed-term contracts, half of the Organization's employees would be denied representation on a major issue if staff representatives were not involved in that process. She therefore called on OHRM to establish the guidelines without delay.

59. Staff representatives had no desire to co-manage the Organization. They were, however, entitled to engage in meaningful consultation at a sufficiently early stage for their inputs to influence the final decision. The private sector was aware that consultation with employees could save valuable resources and prevent waste and had realized that such consultation was not co-management but sound management. The staff and the staff representatives were major stakeholders in a reform process that would shape their future.

60. **Ms. Eldon** (President, Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA)) said that FICSA welcomed the increasing attention being given to human resources management reform in the United Nations system, pointing out that, while the documents currently before the Committee focused primarily on human resources management in the United Nations Secretariat, the same or similar concepts were being introduced throughout the common system. The reforms comprised four elements: the delegation of authority, responsibility and accountability to managers; the streamlining or simplification of procedures; a programme of career development and advancement of staff; and increased consultation among all parties concerned and at all levels.

61. The delegation of authority, responsibility and accountability to managers required a clear understanding of the managerial skills involved, together with adequate resources, including human resources. Staff at all levels were to be held accountable by means of performance appraisal and a system of rewards, remedial actions and sanctions, as appropriate. In view of the difficulty of objective performance appraisal in a multicultural environment, any performance appraisal system required adequate safeguards against unfair treatment of staff, including review bodies with the involvement of staff representatives at all stages. The current top-down performance appraisal system also needed to be complemented by a component that enabled the supervised to make comments on the supervisor. FICSA considered that the Secretary-General's proposals focused too heavily on accountability mechanisms and sanctions, and not enough on staff motivation.

62. The streamlining of procedures should not be pursued at the expense of transparency, since that would undermine trust in the reform process. In that connection, FICSA was strongly opposed to the abolition of joint staff management bodies; contrary to what was stated in the Secretary-General's report on human resources management reform (A/53/414), they did not diffuse responsibility since they were only advisory and did nothing to impair the ultimate responsibility of the Secretary-General.

63. The staff development programme outlined in document A/53/414 was ambitious, particularly in its aim to meet the development needs and career aspirations of staff members. It would require stable organizational funding to permit long-term planning and adequate resources for training. Noting that specific attention was paid in the document to the importance of linguistic competence for both recruitment and promotion purposes, she said that the ICSC recommendations to minimize the current language incentives should be deferred until the linguistic needs of each organization had been ascertained. FICSA fully supported the implied move towards a merit-based approach to recruitment and promotion while recognizing the competing claims of geographical representation and gender balance. Staff advancement was only possible where provision was made for vertical mobility. Noting that the Secretary-General's proposals suggested that linked grades might provide for such a movement, she said that linked grades had been condemned by ICSC, were not in line with current job classification standards and might contravene the principle of equal pay for work of equal value. Noting that flexibility and mobility were fundamental constants of the Secretary-General's human resources management reform proposals, she pointed out that there were limits to flexibility and mobility, particular in specialized

agencies that required specialized technical expertise rather than general competence.

64. If staff were to be considered partners in the process of change, it would be necessary to define clearly what constituted consultations and to ensure that it was more than a mere formality. In the view of FICSA, the process of change should begin with a changed relationship between management and staff characterized by: an environment that respected and valued all employees; a willingness to share power; respect and trust for all; open and candid sharing of information; joint decision-making through consensus; the joint identification and solving of problems; and faith that partnership would lead to a more effective organization. In that connection, FICSA appealed to the Member States to take the necessary steps to reflect the spirit of the ILO conventions on labour in the staff rules and regulations of the organizations of the common system.

65. A supportive work environment that included job security and enabled staff members to respond to the pressures of work and family life would undoubtedly strengthen motivation. FICSA reiterated its strong concern about the security of staff in the field, particularly locally recruited staff who were nationals of the host country and who did not enjoy the same degree of protection as international staff. The Federation appealed to all Member States to end the discrimination between international and local staff for security purposes. The international civil service was founded on the allegiance of staff to the organizations alone and on the reciprocal duty of Member States to refrain from violating the independent nature of organizations of the United Nations system.

66. In conclusion, she said that FICSA was strongly in favour of reform. Each reform initiative must be assessed in terms of its potential to promote an effective, accountable and independent international civil service. The essential components of reform included stronger labour-management partnerships, competitive conditions of employment, job security, administrative accountability, stable organizational funding, merit-based assessment of candidates and ethical leadership.

*The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.*