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REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

Comments by the Federation of International
Civil Servants' Association (FICSA)

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General transmits herewith for consideration by the Fifth Committee a document submitted by the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA). This document has been presented pursuant to the provisions of paragraph 2 (b) of General Assembly resolution 35/213 of 17 December 1980, whereby the General Assembly reiterated its readiness "to receive and consider fully the views of the staff as set out by a designated representative of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations in a document submitted through the Secretary-General under the agenda item entitled "Report of the International Civil Service Commission".

INTRODUCTION

1. The Federation of the International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) represents, through its 30 member Associations and Unions, more than 40,000 international civil servants employed world-wide. FICSA is pleased to note that General Assembly resolution 35/213 foresees increased participation by the Federation in the Committee's deliberations.
2. The Federation trusts that its objectives and purposes are by now well known to the members of the Committee. In sum, our role is to preserve the integrity of the international civil service and to defend and promote the rights of the staff members who form the human element of that perhaps rather nebulous concept.
3. FICSA wishes to stress at the outset that the staff members of the United Nations system are committed to serving the international community and working towards improved conditions of life for all citizens of the world. Therefore, their preoccupations can be expected to transcend exclusively material concerns.

4. This commitment, however, is in no way incompatible with a striving for improvement in terms and conditions of service. Indeed, an assurance that we are being treated in a manner consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and international labour standards is crucial to upholding a sense of identity with the vast and disparate community we serve and to maintaining the standards of excellence on which the United Nations was founded.

5. Regrettably, FICSA sees, at this point, serious cause for concern. The persistent deterioration in the terms and conditions of the international civil service continues; unless there is some let-up in this apparently relentless process, there is a real danger that the United Nations system will wither away from lack of support. On every level, be it financially based concerns, career structure or the physical security of our colleagues, no relief seems to be forthcoming.

6. Worse still, United Nations staff see little support for their concerns or their interests, either within the system or outside it. Indeed, it is becoming fashionable openly to deride the value of United Nations personnel. FICSA submits that this is not what the staff of the United Nations deserve. Their unique commitment should be unequivocally defended by administrations and Member States alike.

7. FICSA must state its strong dissatisfaction with the manner in which the entire gamut of the problems facing the staff is being dealt with at the present time at the common system level. More specifically, it is becoming increasingly alarmed by the inability, or reluctance, of ICSC to discharge its responsibilities as an independent, technical body.

8. This report to the Fifth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly should therefore be viewed in the nature of an appeal to the Member States which our constituents serve to give us the vote of confidence we so desperately need in these difficult times.

A. CAREER STRUCTURE

9. FICSA has taken note of the two reports submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to resolution 35/210 A on certain aspects of the career structure of United Nations staff. The first, contained as annex I to the ICSC report, notes the Commission's progress to date and its projected work programme in the different areas into which the Commission has divided its work under articles 13 and 14 of its statute. Without, at this point, commenting on the Commission's past activities in this area or prejudging its future action, FICSA believes this step-by-step approach to be realistic for the treatment of this complex subject. The General Assembly's decision, designed to accelerate the investigation of specific areas of the United Nations career structure, is understood by the staff as having been motivated by recognition of the urgent need for a coherent personnel policy in the United Nations Secretariat. The staff shares this concern, and the record will show that personnel reforms are a major preoccupation for the staff of the entire system. The staff is also frustrated at the slow pace of

reform. At the same time, the full and active participation of both staff and administrations at all levels of the common system must be recognized as a prerequisite for workable reforms. The few months available since the adoption of General Assembly resolution 35/210 have not permitted meaningful consultations at any level on subjects which touch at the core of the international civil service.

10. FICSA notes, in this connexion, that the JIU report contained in document A/36/432, while also of a preliminary nature, raises issues which have fundamental implications for the staff of the entire common system. This, indeed, is explicitly noted in the report. Under these circumstances, FICSA strongly believes that all issues raised in these two reports should be submitted for study and consultation at the interagency level before any decisions are taken. Even prior determinations, at this stage, could have the effect of short-circuiting this legitimate consultation process. They would, moreover, have the most undesirable effect of further alienating the staff at the very time that they are seeking some reassurance from their legislative bodies that they will not be used as the scapegoats for the administrative shortcomings of the system. FICSA therefore urges the Committee to recommend that any action in this area be deferred at least until the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly. The staff, for their part, reiterate their readiness to address themselves to deficiencies and anomalies apparent in the system. At the proper time, the staff will have a specific and detailed contribution to make to this reform process.

B. SECURITY AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE

11. The basic objective of FICSA is to defend the integrity of the international civil service; in this area, it sees cause for concern at many levels. The various problem areas described below present an alarming picture, to say the least, and require bold and decisive action.

1. Arrest and detention of staff members

12. The adoption of the ACC declaration on the security and independence of the international civil service and the introduction of administrative procedures for the reporting of arrest and detention, and for the submission of resignations have provided, at best, a limited deterrent to arrest and detention. They have not brought about the release of our imprisoned colleagues, whose continued incarceration is a grim indictment of the United Nations.

13. Last year, FICSA expressed its concern to the Fifth Committee about the fate of staff members who had been subjected to arbitrary measures in the performance of their official duties. To the Federation's knowledge, only one staff member has been released from detention in the meantime. FICSA therefore reiterates its plea to the Fifth Committee, in the strongest possible terms, to draw the fate of staff members who have been arrested or detained or have disappeared to the attention of the General Assembly, with a view to finding a human solution for our colleagues.

14. FICSA notes with appreciation the adoption of General Assembly resolution 35/212 on the respect for the privileges and immunities of officials of United Nations and specialized agencies, which can be seen as an expression of support for the rights of United Nations staff under the Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

15. Bearing in mind, however, that United Nations staff of various levels are expected to serve in circumstances that may very well expose them to risk, FICSA urges the Committee to reiterate an appeal to the Member States to respect not only the privileges and immunities accorded to officials of United Nations organizations but the status of all international civil servants. It should be pointed out, in this connexion, that all staff members, whether internationally or locally recruited, are international civil servants.

2. Security of staff in the field and crisis management

16. Limited progress has been made in this area during the last two years, but a coherent policy is still lacking. Efforts should therefore be speeded up at all levels, with a view to giving adequate protection to United Nations staff, both internationally and locally recruited.

3. Political interference

17. The independence of the international civil service is increasingly menaced. It is common knowledge that political pressure is brought to bear in respect of recruitment and promotion. FICSA believes that political trends in recruitment and personnel policies must be halted now, if the international civil service is to retain any credibility. The implementation of a sound and coherent career policy would generate a healthier climate in the organizations. On the other hand, the introduction of personnel practices based on increased politicization of the secretariats can only hasten the collapse of the international civil service.

4. Supplementary payments

18. FICSA maintains that the practice of supplementary payments to staff employed in United Nations organizations, in whatever form and under whatever pretext, constitutes a threat to the independence and integrity of the international civil service. FICSA concurs with the Commission's position that supplementary payments are inappropriate, undesirable and inconsistent with the provisions of staff regulations, but it cannot accept that they are unnecessary. Given the general constraint with which Member States view any increases in their budgets, it seems most unlikely that supplementary payments are made in a spirit of generosity.

19. The action recommended by the Commission to the General Assembly - namely, to remind all Member States that the practice of supplementary payments is unnecessary, inappropriate and undesirable - is inadequate and does not address the real problem, which is treated in section C 2 below. Such exhortations, if heeded, will merely inhibit recruitment from the countries concerned.

20. Inasmuch as supplementary payments run counter to the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of the Staff Regulations, they should be abolished, and action should be taken to rectify the situation which leads to the granting of such payments in the first place.

C. CONDITIONS OF SERVICE

1. General Service staff

Staff assessment

21. FICSA deplors the fact that ICSC has not seen fit to respond to the Federation's repeated requests for an early and comprehensive review of staff assessment. It should be recalled that the essential significance of staff assessment is to determine the level of pensionable remuneration for General Service staff.

22. FICSA has always said that if a revision of the staff assessment rates became necessary, a thorough study of changes in the existing system should be based on an objective analysis linked to a consistent social policy and not on subjective perceptions about absolute or relative levels of salaries and pensionable remuneration. In line with this approach and with a view to eliminating at least in one respect discrepancies existing between the two categories of staff, FICSA has consistently urged the return to a single scale for all categories of staff, which, the Committee will recall, in fact, existed until 1977.

23. The Committee is well aware that the revised scale adopted in General Assembly resolution 35/214, on the recommendation of ICSC, was vehemently opposed by the staff. The staff's objections were not so much to a revision of the scale per se; rather, they were based on the following considerations

(a) The scheme adopted was founded on unsubstantiated assumptions of a level of gross salaries considered to be too high at some duty stations; not balanced against this was the fact that in many duty stations away from Headquarters the level of net and gross salaries is very low.

(b) The impact of the new scales for most duty stations had not been calculated in advance; when the calculations were eventually made, after the fact, it emerged that the new scale would reduce pensionable remuneration everywhere and thus hit, in particular, at the already disadvantaged field staff.

(c) By no means least, consultations on the proposed new scale were totally inadequate. After the item had been on the ICSC agenda for several years and after a number of unsuccessful attempts had been made to change the scale (since admittedly this is a complex issue), the ICSC secretariat came up with new proposals during the course of the Commission's twelfth session in July 1980. Despite protests by FICSA that this procedure did not allow for study and consultation of the proposals, ICSC recommended the new scale, since it produced the "desired" effect of reducing pensionable remuneration in some major duty

stations for which superficial calculations had been made. The staff's concerns were thereafter brought to the Fifth Committee at the Assembly's thirty-fifth session, but the Commission's recommendations prevailed.

24. The adoption of the revised scale created unparalleled discontent among the staff. FICSA then returned to the Commission at its thirteenth session with a request for an early and comprehensive review of General Service staff assessment, basing itself, inter alia, on the provisions of General Assembly resolution 35/214 A, section III, paragraph 2, with a view to returning to a unified staff assessment scale for all staff. It is emphasized that that request, reiterated at the fourteenth session, was supported by the administrations, which considered that the issue was of such importance for the coherence of the salary system world-wide and for staff/management relations that it amply justified the effort involved: the administrations added that problems had already arisen with regard to the implementation of the new scale in some duty stations. Regrettably, the annual report of ICSC contains no reference to the discussions which took place on this item at both the thirteenth and fourteenth sessions.

25. In spite of these pleas, the Commission maintained that there were no grounds for an immediate reconsideration of its recommendation on staff assessment rates for General Service staff; nor did the Commission consider that any new elements had been brought to light. Staff dissatisfaction with the revised scales was considered irrelevant. The Commission decided to confine itself to a study of staff assessment as part of the over-all review of the determination of General Service salaries. It specifically stated that the study should have very limited scope. If carried out in this manner, the study would not address itself to the Federation's major concerns. FICSA, therefore, requests the Fifth Committee to recommend that the Commission be instructed to undertake, without delay, a fundamental and comprehensive review of the General Service staff assessment scale and to include in the study the return to a unified scale for all staff.

2. Professional staff

Level of remuneration

26. FICSA wishes to bring before the Fifth Committee the growing discontent of Professional staff members with regard to their level of remuneration. The Federation is aware of, and has studied with great care, the ongoing ICSC studies related to various aspects of this issue. At the same time, it is acutely conscious of the fact that the prevailing economic climate is not an auspicious one for increased expenditure in any area. Additional funds for staff costs, are, the staff have been told, the last thing that we can expect at this time. The question must be asked: why? Is the efficiency and morale of a staff working for the highest ideals of mankind a factor to which Member States do not attach importance? FICSA does not believe that the Professional staff of the United Nations can reasonably be expected any longer to tolerate a clearly recognized deterioration of their level of remuneration. The Federation has gone before the various common system bodies on this issue and has elicited a measure of sympathy from some quarters, but active support does not appear to be forthcoming at this stage. The system seems to be paralyzed by political considerations.

27. The staff see no reason to participate in this conspiracy of silence and request the Fifth Committee to give serious consideration to their request for a 10 per cent interim salary increase, pending the outcome of the long-term studies being conducted or planned by ICSC. This request is based on the fact that during the last decade, the purchasing power of Professional remuneration has declined substantially. It should be recalled, in this connexion, that the 1975 base salary increase did not fully compensate for the erosion in purchasing power since the previous adjustment in 1971.

28. Related phenomena which demonstrate the slippage in Professional salaries are:

(a) The decline in the quality of services which the organizations are able to deliver to Member States which results from increasing difficulties in recruiting staff of the requisite calibre;

(b) The resultant distortion of current grading patterns by the dramatically decreased use of the nominal entry grades P-1 and P-2 (which, in some organizations, are not used at all);

(c) The practice of several Member Governments of offering to certain of their nationals financial inducements over and above standard remuneration rates, in order to attract and retain those persons in the international civil service;

(d) The declining morale and, hence, the risk of impaired effectiveness of international civil servants in the Professional category. As indicated earlier, this phenomenon is not a factor solely of salaries, but there is no doubt that the salary scales of the Professional staff of the United Nations system and the manner in which this growing problem has been addressed constitute a crucial element.

29. The long-awaited ICSC studies, relating to Professional remuneration, finally taken up under intense pressure from the Federation, have failed to shed any light on the problem. The Federation's extensive technical comments (further details of which can be provided on request) made during the course of 1981 were not taken into account. The Federation hopes that more serious efforts will be made in the future to come to grips with the complex technical issues involved.

30. FICSA urges the Committee to recommend that, pending the outcome of the studies, ongoing or contemplated, regarding the determination of Professional remuneration, an interim increase of 10 per cent be granted.

Children's allowances

31. FICSA submitted a request to the Commission this year that the children's allowance for Professional staff, the dollar amount of which had remained unchanged since 1975, should be increased. This was supported by the administrations.

32. While the Commission received rather favourably the Federation's well-documented request, it finally concluded that it had to study the rationale for the allowance and the determination of its amount as part of its over-all study of the interrelationship between all the various entitlements under the salary system - a study which it has had on its work programme since 1978, without ever having begun it. In addition, the Commission now plans to make a linkage of the study on the children's allowance for Professional staff with the study of dependency allowances for the General Service staff.

33. If the Commission intends to proceed in this way, FICSA trusts that the study will be completed next year, so that the staff will not have to wait unduly. FICSA is becoming more than uneasy about the Commission's apparent tendency to get entangled in an inextricable web of studies.

34. FICSA requests the Fifth Committee to recommend that the ICSC be instructed to complete its study on children's allowances, as well as the related reviews it intends to make, in 1982.

3. Field staff

35. FICSA notes with satisfaction the promulgation by the Commission of the scheme authorized by the General Assembly in resolution 35/214 A, section IV. The Federation spearheaded this initiative and has been an active participant in the development of the scheme. FICSA trusts that the ongoing review process will ensure that the new scheme has the desired effect of affording relief to staff working under arduous conditions, who can truly be said to be at the cutting edge of development.

36. FICSA, however, is disappointed that it has not been possible, so far, for the Commission to make a thorough review of all conditions of service away from headquarters duty stations for all categories of staff, both internationally and locally recruited. There is a tendency to forget the latter, who make up one third of the staff in the United Nations organizations.

37. FICSA drew the attention of the Fifth Committee last year to the fact that the problems of these staff members with regard to career development, job classification and salary determination are quite different from those at Headquarters. Moreover, in some countries where security problems exist, locally recruited General Service staff do not always enjoy the kind of protection to which they are entitled as international civil servants. No progress has been made during the past year for locally recruited staff in the field. A document has been submitted by FICSA to the Commission, aimed at improving at least some of the more glaring inequities.

38. As it did last year, FICSA requests the Fifth Committee to urge the Commission to complete its study of conditions of service in the field without further delay.

D. STATUS OF WOMEN

39. In its submission to the Fifth Committee at the thirty-fifth session, FICSA noted that a series of resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, containing recommendations to the executive heads of all organizations, had not resulted in increased employment of women, particularly at senior and decision-making levels. In resolution 35/210, section V, the Assembly, expressing deep concern at the lack of progress in increasing the proportion of women employed, requested the Secretary-General and the executive heads of the specialized agencies to take a series of steps designed to improve the recruitment of women in the organizations and to eliminate sexual bias. At the same time, the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), was requested to report back to the thirty-sixth session of the General Assembly on "progress made in the organizations of the United Nations system in the recruitment, conditions of employment, career development and promotion of women in the Professional category and above". At the time of preparation of this document, no report had been made available in response to the Assembly's request.

1. Recruitment of women

40. Progress since last year has, by and large, been imperceptible. The fundamental problem is that few organizations of the common system have even established targets for the employment of women. Only one organization has met such a target, and it is one of the smallest organizations. In at least two large agencies of the common system, the percentage of women in the Professional category has actually decreased since 1975; in another large agency, the situation has remained static. Moreover, the grade spread of women staff is still poor; the proportion of women at levels D-1 and above continues to be extremely low in both the United Nations and the other agencies of the common system. A more dynamic and imaginative approach to the recruitment problem is clearly needed.

2. Conditions of employment

41. Practices such as the employment of spouses, part-time employment and flexible working hours are applied unevenly throughout the system. While they can be welcomed as progressive management practice, they do not per se enhance the employment of women in the Professional category. Some organizations have part-time employment for all categories of staff; the introduction of part-time work for the General Service category only, as in the United Nations Secretariat, cannot improve the employment of women in the Professional category, particularly when there are barriers between the two categories, e.g., competitive examinations. Part-time work for all categories of staff should be extended to all agencies.

42. In addition to the above-cited personnel practices, a more positive attitude should be taken towards the provision of child-care facilities.

3. Career development and promotion

43. Career development opportunities for women have to be viewed in the context of the fact that career development programmes for all staff, of both sexes and all categories, are poor in most organizations of the system. This is a long-term problem of major proportions. A specific, action-oriented approach should therefore be taken towards career development for women. One example is the range of tasks and responsibilities assigned to women staff; they are often not entrusted with supervisory or outside-contact work, both of which are factors in the classification of posts at higher grades.

4. Discrimination

44. The main problem appears not to lie in legislating non-discrimination but in changing attitudes.

45. The existing situation clearly calls for a renewed commitment to the application of General Assembly resolution 35/210 and preceding resolutions. As experience has shown, however, reiterating principles and recalling resolutions is not enough to improve the situation. Increased efforts must be made actually to recruit women to Professional level posts, and specific measures taken to enhance their upward mobility, once recruited.

E. SUMMARY

Career structure

46. FICSA urges the Fifth Committee to recommend that any action in this area be deferred at least until the thirty-seventh session of the General Assembly. The full and active participation of the staff at all levels of the common system must be recognized as a prerequisite for workable reforms.

Security and independence of the international civil service

47. FICSA reiterates its plea to the Fifth Committee, in the strongest possible terms, to draw the fate of staff members who have been arrested or detained or have disappeared to the attention of the General Assembly, with a view to finding a human solution for our colleagues. FICSA urges the Committee to reiterate an appeal to the Member States to respect not only the privileges and immunities accorded to officials of United Nations organizations but the status of all international civil servants. Inasmuch as supplementary payments run counter to the spirit of the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of the Staff Regulations, they should be abolished, and action should be taken to rectify the situation which led to the granting of such payments in the first place.

Conditions of service

General Service staff

48. FICSA requests the Fifth Committee to recommend that the Commission be instructed to undertake, without delay, a fundamental and comprehensive review of the General Service staff assessment scale and to include in the study the return to a unified scale for all staff.

Professional staff

(a) Level of remuneration

49. FICSA urges the Committee to recommend that, pending the outcome of the studies, ongoing or contemplated, regarding the determination of Professional remuneration, an interim increase of 10 per cent be granted.

(b) Children's allowance

50. FICSA requests the Fifth Committee to recommend that ICSC be instructed to complete its study on children's allowances, as well as the related review it intends to make, in 1982.

(c) Field staff

51. As it did last year, FICSA requests the Fifth Committee to urge the Commission to complete its study of conditions of service in the field without further delay.

Status of women

52. Increased efforts must be made actually to recruit women to Professional level posts, and specific measures taken to enhance their upward mobility, once recruited.