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UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM: REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

Comments by the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations

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'".

REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

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Summary of the main FICSA recommendations

Apart from the recommendations of the ICSC for which FICSA has already expressed support as indicated in the Commission's ninth annual report, a summary is given below of the additional recommendations which FICSA wishes to submit to the General Assembly at its thirty-eighth session.

A. Conditions of service in the field (paras. 4 to 8)

ICSC to be urged to complete studies without further delay. Improvements with retroactive effect, where feasible.

B. Security of staff of the United Nations common system (paras. 9 to 11)

Member States to take urgent and decisive action on several fronts.

C. Staffing policies

Career development - types of appointment (para. 12)

General Assembly to exhort other organizations urgently to adopt legislation similar to resolution 37/126.

Human resources planning (para. 13)

General Assembly to recommend that organizations pursue integrated approach to human resources planning.

Recruitment policy (para. 14)

General Assembly to mandate ICSC to take up recruitment of nationals from under-represented and unrepresented countries, women, young people and disabled persons as matters of priority.

General Assembly to reiterate firm belief that political considerations should not enter into recruitment process.

D. Salaries and allowances

Professional remuneration (paras. 22 to 24)

General Assembly to take up matter of interim increase at thirty-eighth session.

Total compensation (para. 26)

General Assembly to allocate funds for comparisons of expatriate benefits.

Education grant (paras. 27 to 28)

Apart from other adjustments recommended by ICSC, General Assembly to advocate introduction of continuous monitoring procedure to keep grant in line with rising education costs.

E. Social security

Health insurance (paras. 31 to 35)

General Assembly to instruct ICSC to undertake full review of premiums, benefits, after-service coverage and insurance for locally recruited General Service staff in the field.

REPORT OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION

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INTRODUCTION

1. The Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) herewith submits its comments on the ninth annual report of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) transmitted to the Fifth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly by the Secretary-General. The consideration of this report by the Fifth Committee marks the culmination of a year of discussion and deliberation in ICSC, in which FICSA has consistently sought to play a constructive and responsible part. The Federation is awaiting with keen interest the outcome of the deliberations of the General Assembly on this report, which spans virtually the entire spectrum of conditions of employment. In one way or another, every single staff member represented by FICSA throughout the common system will be affected, for better or for worse, by the decisions taken on this report. In presenting its views both to ICSC and to the Fifth Committee, FICSA is constantly mindful of the need to take fully into account the concerns and interests of its global membership. The Federation is confident that the Fifth Committee will show an equal awareness of the needs and aspirations of the staff in its discussion under the present agenda item.
2. In its presentation to the Fifth Committee in 1982, FICSA laid stress on the role of the Federation as a pool of staff union income and expertise and as a vehicle for strengthening and unifying the international civil service. The events of the last year have brought further confirmation of the staff's determination to act through FICSA in order to defend their existing benefits and to strive for further improvements. At the same time, the staff throughout the United Nations system are becoming increasingly concerned by the trend to regard the common system as a levelling device designed to pare all benefits down to the lowest common denominator. A common feature of the agreements between the United Nations and the other organizations participating in the common system is the recognition of the need to develop a single, unified international civil service in order ultimately to obtain the maximum benefit from the services rendered by the staff. It seems evident to FICSA that the organizations will not be able to gain such benefit unless the benefits they offer to their staff are of a commensurate value.
3. FICSA duly appreciated the decision by the Fifth Committee in 1981 and 1982 to invite the Federation to make an oral statement in order to introduce its views on the report of ICSC. It is the Federation's earnest hope that it will again be permitted to address the Committee directly in 1983 in order to be able to highlight those areas of greatest concern to the staff of the common system.

A. CONDITIONS OF SERVICE IN THE FIELD

4. FICSA is acutely conscious of the importance of field issues as directly affecting the main arena of United Nations activities. FICSA is equally conscious

of the vital role played by all staff serving in the field and of the need to offer equitable conditions of employment. FICSA has been continually urging a comprehensive review of conditions of service in the field and therefore welcomed the Commission's decision at its fifteenth session to embark on a detailed survey of all aspects of field service. The Federation submitted extensive documentation which was intended not only to back up its own proposals but also to complement and amplify the information gathered by the ICSC secretariat. The length of the papers submitted testifies to the importance attached to the review, both by the staff representatives and by the Commission, and FICSA is confident that the Fifth Committee will be equally cognizant of the scope and gravity of the subject.

5. The improvements in the installation grant and assignment allowance in 1982 were welcomed by FICSA as interim steps along the road towards meaningful, much needed and long awaited improvements in all aspects of field service. At its eighteenth session, ICSC considered a broad review by its secretariat of the conditions of service offered by governmental and intergovernmental aid agencies and organizations. FICSA submitted the results of a survey among United Nations resident co-ordinators at difficult duty stations which were at substantial variance with the results of the ICSC review and which demonstrated that United Nations system conditions of service compare unfavourably with those offered by other development aid agencies. The continuing decline in the field employment package must be halted if the effectiveness of the United Nations aid programmes is to be maintained and enhanced. Recruitment difficulties, especially in those duty stations where conditions of life and work are most difficult, are a source of increasing alarm among the organizations, and failure to attract staff of the requisite calibre will do untold harm to the image of the United Nations system throughout the world.

6. In its presentation to the Commission, FICSA called for the elaboration of a systematic methodology to set and review periodically the level of cash and non-cash benefits to staff serving in the field. Failure to adopt such a methodology will only perpetuate the erosion of conditions of service and further prejudice the capacity of organizations to attract, retain and reassign competent staff. At the same time, FICSA concluded that a number of immediate improvements could and should be made to certain specific conditions of service in the field. The current shrinkage of staffing tables only accentuates the need for an efficient use of human resources and, hence, for mobility. Increased incentives to mobility will have an immediate and beneficial impact on the competitiveness of the United Nations as a development aid employer. At the same time, urgent attention must be given to the problems facing the locally recruited General Service staff who play a unique role as the continuing back-up for the various aid programmes.

7. The Commission has made a disappointing response to the joint plea by the administrations through the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) and by FICSA for priority attention to a number of specific issues. By consigning most of those issues to further study and deferring decisions until later sessions, the Commission failed to seize an opportunity to take early remedial action which would arrest the decline in conditions of field service and the corresponding slippage in the delivery of aid programmes.

8. FICSA welcomes and supports the improvements decided upon this year, but it must point out that they are a drop in the ocean and will not do much to improve conditions of service in the field on a more general level. The Commission should therefore be instructed to complete the studies outlined in its report without further delay. Where feasible, improvements should be introduced with retroactive effect in order not to make staff in the field suffer as a result of these constant postponements.

B. SECURITY OF STAFF OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM

9. In resolution 37/236, the General Assembly invited the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), to propose further steps to alleviate the deteriorating security situation confronting the staff of the United Nations common system. FICSA welcomed that resolution and, in the same spirit that motivated its previous initiatives on the subject, redoubled its efforts during 1983, with a view to the adoption of better measures to guarantee the security and protection of common system staff throughout the world.

10. Subject to certain exceptions, FICSA broadly endorses the recommendations of the Ad Hoc Security Inter-agency Task Force of ACC, which was convened in January 1983, and those of CCAQ which have now been approved by ACC. The Federation welcomes this response by the organizations to resolution 37/236 which demonstrates their desire to achieve better enforcement of the principles and a greater adherence to their obligations contained in the Convention on Privileges and Immunities.

11. Since the last session of the General Assembly, the steady stream of cases of arrest, detention, disappearance and death of staff members has continued unabated, and FICSA therefore wishes to renew its earnest appeal to the States concerned to take immediate and decisive action:

(a) To grant the executive head or his representative immediate access to any staff member under arrest or detention;

(b) To provide full details of the grounds for such arrest or detention, including the main facts or formal charges;

(c) To ensure that the staff member is provided with legal counsel and given the benefit of due legal process;

(d) To release immediately staff members against whom no formal charges are made or substantiated;

(e) To make every conceivable effort to find a humane solution to cases still pending;

(f) Fully to respect the Convention on Privileges and Immunities in the future.

C. STAFFING POLICIES

1. Career development - types of appointment

12. FICSA welcomed the decision of the General Assembly in resolution 37/126 that staff members on fixed-term appointments, upon completion of five years of continuing good service, shall be given every reasonable consideration for a career appointment. FICSA has consistently advocated the establishment of a main core of career staff in all organizations, comprising at least 75 per cent of the complement, and is convinced that the fundamental requirements of the Charter of the United Nations cannot be met unless such a core is established and maintained. The Federation has frequently expressed its alarm at the proliferation of fixed-term appointments in the common system, and this retrograde trend is showing no signs of subsiding. In 1983, FICSA undertook extensive consultations among its membership to determine the extent to which legislation similar to that contained in resolution 37/126 was being implemented in other organizations of the common system. Without exception, all members reported that so far no steps had been taken by legislative bodies to follow the example set by the General Assembly in 1982. With a view to putting an end to the growing feelings of insecurity and frustration among the staff, FICSA has encouraged its members to press for the adoption of similar legislation. The Federation earnestly hopes that the General Assembly will, itself, go one step further in 1983 and not only monitor the implementation of the relevant provisions of resolution 37/126 but also exhort other organizations urgently to adopt similar legislation in order to halt the current decline in morale among the very large numbers of staff holding fixed-term appointments. In the same way that the terms of resolution 37/126 contain no limitation based on geographical considerations, other common system legislative bodies should be urged not to impose any geographically inspired constraints on the proportion of career appointments to be granted to their staff. FICSA recognizes the value of an appropriate geographical balance in the secretariats but remains convinced that this balance is best maintained through co-ordinated recruitment procedures and not through the imposition of career barriers and non-renewal of contracts.

2. Human resources planning

13. FICSA generally welcomes the initiatives of the Commission in this regard, which may be seen to be generally in line with the terms of General Assembly resolution 37/126 supporting the concept of integrated personnel management based on human resources planning. The scheme proposed by the ICSC secretariat is a useful model which could be tailored to fit the requirements of each organization, whether large or small. Such a scheme should extend over the whole gamut of personnel management, from entry into service through movement within the service to separation from the service. In line with the terms of General Assembly resolution 37/126, it should be equally applicable to staff on fixed-term and career appointments. FICSA welcome the holding of interorganizational seminars on human resources planning both at headquarters and in the field and made an active contribution to the first such seminar held in New York in September 1983. The General Assembly should recommend the organizations to pursue the development of an integrated approach to human resources planning, with a view to enhancing the career development opportunities for their staff.

3. Recruitment policy

14. While welcoming the Commission's attention to this important element of personnel management, FICSA is rather disappointed at the slow progress and, in particular, at the low priority assigned in the Commission's future work programme to some aspects of recruitment which are already in a state of neglect. Despite strong request from FICSA to advance the consideration of proper recruitment measures for women, young people and disabled persons, the Commission now plans to take up these subjects only at its twenty-second session, i.e., in July 1985. The Commission has equally ignored the Federation's request that high priority be assigned to recruitment measures for nationals from unrepresented or under-represented Member States: these items are on the Commission's work programme for the twenty-first session (March 1985). The postponement of these issues is all the more regrettable in view of General Assembly resolution 37/235. In part A of that resolution, the Assembly welcomed the intention of the Secretary-General to develop and apply a medium-term plan of recruitment in order to bring the number of staff from unrepresented or under-represented countries within their desirable ranges by 1985 at the latest. In part B of the same resolution, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General and the heads of all the organizations in the United Nations system to examine additional measures that would advance the attainment of the policy directives of the appropriate legislative bodies concerning the appointment, promotion and assignment of women in the United Nations system. The staff certainly expected the Commission to respond in a more timely manner to that resolution, with a view to supporting the efforts required in order to redress the existing unsatisfactory situation. FICSA therefore requests the General Assembly to mandate the Commission to take up these items as a matter of priority and not in two years' time.

15. FICSA also regrets that the Commission has not touched upon one important aspect of recruitment policy, namely, the question of political influence and its serious repercussions on the independence and integrity of the international civil service. Political interference by some Member States has been increasing over the years and is no longer limited to higher level posts. Quite the contrary, it is now interacting strongly throughout the recruitment process.

16. FICSA would hope that in view of its previous resolutions on the subject, particularly resolution 36/232, the General Assembly would reiterate in the strongest terms its firm belief that political considerations should not be allowed to enter into the recruitment process and reaffirm the appropriateness of the relevant provisions of the Charter, which stipulate that the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity.

4. Retirement policy

17. The Federation's position on this important aspect of personnel policy remains unchanged: on balance, the members of FICSA would not oppose giving the staff the option of working until age 62, provided that:

- (a) This option is available to staff at all levels;
- (b) It is exercised solely at the discretion of the staff member;
- (c) Existing rights to retirement at age 60 and early retirement at age 55, with full pension, are not affected.

18. In 1982, FICSA endorsed the Commission's recommendation for deferral in order to permit a thorough study of retirement age in conjunction with other aspects of personnel policy, such as recruitment. The Federation is concerned that the Commission has not made the type of review which would have enabled it to formulate a clearer position on this issue. The need to avoid an untoward impact on the career development of younger staff is one aspect that will have to be carefully weighed before a final decision is taken. FICSA has noted that, unlike the Commission, the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board has again come out with a clear recommendation on this subject but regrettably for the wrong motive, namely, the current actuarial deficit.

D. SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES

1. General Service staff

Non-resident's allowance

19. Although the Commission took a decision on this subject, in accordance with article 11 of its statute, and the matter is therefore closed for the time being, FICSA, nevertheless, would wish to inform the Fifth Committee that the decision was taken in total disregard for the staff's views.

20. The Commission decided to abolish the non-resident's allowance in all headquarters and most field duty stations for internationally recruited General Service staff, after 31 August 1983. This constitutes a serious deterioration in the conditions of service of such staff. An allowance similar to the assignment allowance for Professional staff, which is limited in time and non-pensionable, will replace the non-resident's allowance in a very small number of field duty stations (19 to be exact).

21. For the other duty stations, the Commission envisages the introduction of a rental subsidy scheme, with effect from 1 September 1983. As the modalities will be elaborated only at the Commission's nineteenth session in March 1984, it is still too early to say whether these measures will compensate internationally recruited General Service staff effectively for their expatriate status. FICSA strongly objects to the Commission's decision regarding the non-concurrence of the General Service assignment allowance and rental subsidy. No such restriction is applicable to the Professional category, since the assignment allowance is not intended to serve the same purpose as the rental subsidy.

2. Professional staff

(a) Professional remuneration

22. Despite the unanimous backing of ACC and the admission by ICSC that an increase was in order, the Fifth Committee failed to accede, in 1982, to the Federation's request for an immediate interim increase in base salary, pending completion of the Commission's longer-term studies on Professional remuneration. That request was founded on a number of compelling arguments, including a chronic loss in purchasing power, the failure to adjust salaries in the comparator civil service, in accordance with the provisions of the Pay Comparability Act, and the threat to the efficiency of the secretariats because of declining morale and increasing recruitment and retention difficulties.

23. These arguments remain equally valid in 1983: indeed, the built-in regression of the post adjustment system has continued to take its toll of the purchasing power of Professional salaries; the salaries in the comparator civil service continue to lag substantially behind private sector pay levels, and the organizations are reporting increasing difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff of the requisite calibre.

24. FICSA would be doing a great disservice to its membership if it did not strongly deplore the fact that the General Assembly did not see fit to include this item on the agenda of its thirty-eighth session and if it did not reiterate its appeal for urgent action to halt the slide in Professional pay. To delay such action further until 1984 will serve only to aggravate a situation which is already causing grave concern to executive heads throughout the common system. The last and only partial adjustment to base salary took place in 1975. The fact that eight years have since passed with no further corrective action to real pay levels is without precedent; Professional staff everywhere are becoming increasingly impatient and restive as a result of this chronic failure on the part of the General Assembly to remedy a legitimate grievance. FICSA therefore urges the General Assembly to address this issue at its current session and grant an adjustment of Professional base salaries of 10 per cent, retroactive to 1 January 1982. FICSA is following with great interest the longer-term studies being undertaken by ICSC but insists that these should not be allowed to delay the granting of an interim increase, the technical case for which has been established beyond question.

(b) Operation of the post adjustment system

25. FICSA considers that it would be premature to broach this subject in its presentation to the Fifth Committee until the resumed session of the Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions (ACPAQ) and the special ICSC session have taken place.

(c) Total compensation

26. FICSA is pleased to note that the Commission has reached a satisfactory agreement on the difference in the age of mandatory separation from service in the

United States federal civil service compared to that of the United Nations. However, one important aspect, relating to the comparison of expatriate benefits applicable on both sides, remains outstanding before the total compensation comparison methodology can be considered complete. FICSA would therefore urge that the necessary funds be allocated in order to carry out this part of the comparison.

3. Allowances for all staff

(a) Education grant

27. It will be recalled that, despite a fully documented FICSA submission in 1982, discussion of the Federation's proposed improvements to the current education grant provisions was postponed by the Commission until 1983. At the same time, the General Assembly took a first step towards recognizing that all staff subject to rotation face schooling problems, irrespective of their nationality or place of recruitment, and agreed to continue to make the grant payable for a limited period to staff returning to their home country. FICSA has noted the request by the General Assembly in resolution 37/126 that the Commission should continue to review the situation of officials subject to rotation. The Federation would urge the General Assembly further to request the Commission to examine and formulate proposals for the extension of the grant to all internationally recruited staff, whatever their duty station. Such an extension would go some way to establishing equity but would still fall short of the Federation's ultimate goal, namely, the extension of the education grant as a social benefit to all staff, irrespective of duty station, nationality or category.

28. The adjustments to the education grant provisions recommended by ICSC will provide some relief to staff currently receiving the grant. However, it must be stressed that too long a period has elapsed since the last review and that, as a result, the present provisions have fallen considerably behind the prevailing level of school fees in the Member States, as demonstrated by the detailed statistics submitted by FICSA and CCAQ, thus resulting in considerable hardship for the staff concerned. FICSA, accordingly, would urge the General Assembly to recommend that the ICSC consider the introduction of a continuous monitoring procedure designed to ensure that the education grant provisions remain in line with fee levels.

(b) Secondary dependant's allowance

29. FICSA firmly believes that the secondary dependant's allowance should be regarded as a social benefit and made payable at all duty stations, irrespective of local practice. The unduly restrictive nature of the current eligibility criteria and the diversity of cultural traditions prevailing in the Member States make an overhaul of the organizations' present practice a necessity. The implications of discontinuing the payment of the allowance at certain duty stations deserve very serious consideration, since a number of other essential benefits are coupled with the recognition of dependency, including, for instance, health insurance coverage and the right of abode in the country of the duty station. The Federation deeply regrets the speed with which the Commission has proceeded to impose further restrictions on the payment of the secondary dependant's allowance, without fully considering the ensuing implications.

(c) Language incentive

30. FICSA considers a financial incentive to be an appropriate way of encouraging Professional staff to learn and use more than one working language. Enhanced training facilities, as advocated by the Commission, are certainly necessary but would not suffice to encourage staff to acquire additional language skills. Until more responsive promotion policies, guaranteeing advancement to those who acquire such skills, are adopted by the organizations, the granting of accelerated increments or other financial incentives should continue and be extended to other organizations in the common system.

E. SOCIAL SECURITY

1. Health insurance

31. In response to General Assembly resolution 37/126, in which the Assembly requested the Commission "to examine the need for raising the ratio of contributions by organizations of the United Nations system for health insurance of staff members and the question of applying appropriate retroactivity", the Commission considered the problem of health insurance subsidies at its seventeenth and eighteenth sessions.

32. Health insurance is an important element of the remuneration package, and FICSA is aware that serious problems have arisen for staff in one particular duty station, i.e., New York, due to the extremely high cost of health care and insurance premiums. The Federation therefore supports any measures to alleviate this particular problem.

33. We do not agree, however, with the approach chosen by the Commission. First, the implications of its recommendation for New York and, as a matter of fact, for other duty stations are not known to FICSA, since calculations were not available when the Commission arrived at its conclusions; nor were they communicated subsequently. Second, FICSA maintains its position that problems of a particular duty station or organization are more appropriately solved at that level than at the level of the common system, provided that such action is without prejudice to the interests of other groups of staff. In the case of health insurance, a change in the ratio of contributions and subsidies should not affect the right of the staff to equal representation in the management of health insurance; this is of particular importance for self-financed and self-administered schemes.

34. Insurance premiums, of course, are only one part of the problem. FICSA therefore reiterates its proposal, which was ignored by the Commission, that a full-fledged review of health insurance questions, including benefits and after-service coverage, be made. At the same time, the problems of insurance coverage for locally recruited staff in field duty stations should be examined.

35. These studies, however, should not delay the introduction of improvements for the staff where they are urgently needed.

2. The proposed International Labour Organisation (ILO)
complementary pension scheme

36. FICSA deplores the manner in which this item was discussed by the Commission, and, in particular, its failure to invite a representative of the ILO Staff Union to represent the views of the staff of that organization, in accordance with rule 37.1 (c) of its rules of procedure. The Commission ignored both the provisions of those rules and the protests of FICSA and proceeded to discuss the matter, mainly behind closed doors.

37. FICSA is increasingly disturbed by the hostile attitude which the Commission is adopting in general with respect to any initiatives by individual organizations, to introduce improvements in conditions of service and, in particular, with respect to ILO. By reacting in this way, the Commission is doing nothing to strengthen its relationship with staff and administrations and to reaffirm its role as the organ created for the regulation and co-ordination of conditions of service in the United Nations common system.

38. It is of the utmost importance to maintain the necessary degree of flexibility in the common system and not to seek too rigid a degree of uniformity or to press for a common solution to all issues, regardless of their scope or nature. Indeed, in the agreements between the United Nations and the other organizations participating on the common system, it is consistently stressed that uniformity shall be sought only to the extent practicable and desirable. Each organization reserves the right to make such arrangements as are necessary to resolve local issues.

39. FICSA is also the first to recognize that within each organization, the executive head and the staff representatives have the right to negotiate conditions of service. The ILO scheme manifestly represents an effort to solve the problem of a particular organization which has not been resolved in a satisfactory manner at the common system level.

F. CONCLUSION

40. Member States have been made fully aware of the current decline in staff morale not only by FICSA but also by other bodies. The Federation is confident that the Fifth Committee is equally conscious of the need to halt this decline if the organizations of the common system are to continue effectively to fulfil their objectives. It lies within the power of the Fifth Committee, as it considers the report of the International Civil Service Commission, to contribute significantly to an improvement in the spirit of the staff, and any failure to do so may further impair the effectiveness of each organization. In submitting the above recommendations, FICSA has sought, in a measured and balanced way, to present a supplement to what is seen by the staff at large as a paltry package of proposals by ICSC which will scarcely contribute towards enhancing the effectiveness of the organizations.
