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Chairman: Mr. Abdelmannan (Vice-Chairman) (Sudan)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administration
and Budgetary Questions:* Ms. McLurg

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*In the absence of Mr. Bródi (Hungary),
Mr. Abdelmannan (Sudan), Vice-Chairman, took
the Chair.*

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 125: United Nations common system
(A/63/30, A/63/360 and A/63/501)

1. **Mr. Rhodes** (Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission), introducing the report of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) for 2008 (A/63/30), recalled that, in its resolution 61/239, the General Assembly had requested ICSC to consider the effectiveness and impact of measures designed to promote recruitment and retention, especially in difficult duty stations. The Commission had conducted surveys of organizations and staff and had found that, in general, organizations had not experienced difficulties in filling vacancies or retaining staff. However, there had been some recruitment difficulties in respect of certain occupational groups, especially technical and highly specialized staff. In addition, some duty stations, especially certain mission areas, had experienced high vacancy rates. He recalled that, in 2007, the Commission had made specific recommendations to address those problems, including the harmonization of conditions of service and contractual reform. Organizations might also wish to address motivational issues, not only in the interest of retaining staff at difficult duty stations, but also to strengthen staff performance. The Commission had indicated areas for priority intervention in its report and would keep the matter under review.

2. ICSC had decided to discontinue the pay-for-performance pilot study because none of the participating organizations had met the criteria for success set out by the Commission in 2004. Because those organizations had had to focus on other priorities, no payouts had been made to high-performing staff members. There had been a lack of ownership of the project among upper and middle management and the support promised by ICSC had not been provided, owing to procurement issues.

3. The Commission would continue to search for an appropriate way to reward staff for excellent performance. It was updating previous decisions regarding performance management and would continue to work with organizations to benchmark best

common system practices against innovative practices in private and public sector entities.

4. The Commission continued to attach great importance to the issue of mobility and had decided to conduct an overall evaluation of the impact of the mobility/hardship scheme, which would be presented to the Committee along with the methodological review due in 2010.

5. Regarding gender balance, ICSC had once again received a disappointing report on the representation of women in the common system. Although most organizations had implemented gender-sensitive policies, with a view to achieving the 50/50 gender goal, women remained underrepresented, particularly at higher levels. The situation was exacerbated by the high number of women who left the system before retirement each year. In its 2006 report, the Commission had made a number of recommendations to address gender balance, which had yet to be adopted by many common system organizations. It encouraged all organizations to systematically conduct exit interviews with departing male and female staff in order to better ascertain the reasons for the early departure of women. It also urged those organizations that had not yet done so to appoint a senior-level official to ensure that gender targets were met in a reasonable period of time.

6. In the course of 2008, the Commission had considered both the methodology and the level of the education grant. Despite some progress, it had concluded that further work was needed to fully meet the review goals of simplification, equity and cost-neutrality. With respect to the grant level, the Commission's recommendations provided, inter alia, for an adjustment in 10 of the current 16 zones. One separate smaller zone had been discontinued.

7. In its report, the Commission recommended that the base/floor salary scale should be increased by 2.33 per cent through the standard consolidation procedure of increasing base salary while commensurately reducing post adjustment levels, with effect from 1 January 2009. The report indicated that the net remuneration margin between United Nations and United States officials in comparable positions had been estimated at 114.1 and that the average margin level for the past five years (2004-2008) was below the desirable midpoint of 115, currently standing at 112.8. Those figures had since been updated, based on the

post adjustment multiplier for New York that had become effective on 1 August 2008 and on the latest staff statistics from the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). According to the most recent information, the net remuneration margin stood at 114.7, while the average margin level for 2004-2008 stood at 112.9.

8. Earlier in 2008, the Commission had revised the methodology for calculating the children's and secondary dependant's allowances for Professional staff, to ensure the fairness of the system and protect against abrupt exchange rate fluctuations. The calculation procedure had also been streamlined with a view to making the system more reflective of child protection-related measures in national tax and social legislation. Based on the revised methodology, the Commission had recommended that the children's and secondary dependant's allowances should be adjusted with effect from 1 January 2009. The revised rates would be phased in over a four-year period in cases where the adjustment resulted in a reduced allowance. The representatives of two Geneva-based organizations had found the proposed transitional arrangements inadequate and had stated their intention to request their governing bodies to review the issue. The Committee might therefore wish to consider the question in the overall context of the cohesiveness of the common system.

9. The recommendations that called for action by the Committee and their financial implications were summarized at the beginning of the Commission's report. The ICSC secretariat would be pleased to provide further information in the informal consultations.

10. **Mr. Belov** (Programme Planning and Budget Division), introducing the statement submitted by the Secretary-General in accordance with rule 153 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly on the administrative and financial implications of the decisions and recommendations contained in the report of ICSC for 2008 (A/63/360), said that paragraphs 2 to 23 of the Secretary-General's statement set out the effects of the Commission's decisions and recommendations on the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009. Chapter II explained the implications of changes in the base/floor salary scale, mobility and hardship allowance and dependency allowances for Professional and higher staff, while chapter III covered the results of the Commission's

surveys of best prevailing conditions of employment in Geneva and Vienna. Chapter IV outlined the budget implications of the recommended changes in the levels of the education grant and hazard pay for all categories of staff.

11. The financial implications for the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 resulting from the Commission's decisions and recommendations were estimated at \$3.6 million. The additional requirements would be taken into consideration when preparing the first performance report of the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 by recomputing the common staff cost component of the programme budget.

12. **Ms. McLurg** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the Advisory Committee's related report (A/63/501), said that, in accordance with past practice, the Advisory Committee had confined its consideration of the financial implications of the recommendations contained in the report of ICSC (A/63/30) to those submitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General in his statement (A/63/360). The Advisory Committee had not commented on the recommendations themselves or on their underlying methodology.

13. The Secretary-General had estimated that the financial implications for the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009 resulting from the Commission's recommendations amounted to \$3,614,200. He had also indicated that those requirements would be taken into consideration when preparing the first performance report of the programme budget for the biennium 2008-2009, in accordance with the existing practice. The Advisory Committee had no objection to the Secretary-General's approach.

14. **The Chairman**, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 35/213, invited a representative of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) to make a statement.

15. **Mr. Mobio** (Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations) said that, for the second year in a row, the International Civil Service Commission's report did not include a summary of the staff's views. That was a violation of rule 22.2 of the Commission's rules of procedure, which governed its reporting to the General Assembly.

16. In his address to the General Assembly at the opening of its sixty-third session, the Secretary-General had pointed out the need to replace the current system of contracts and conditions of service because it was dysfunctional and demoralizing and because it discouraged mobility between United Nations departments and the field. The Secretary-General had also stressed that the time had come to invest more in the Organization's staff. The Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) urged Member States to bear those remarks in mind while considering the Federation's comments.

17. The Federation had consistently expressed its objections to the concept of pay-for-performance and saw no need to reduce the already limited seven-grade Professional salary grid to three broad bands of pay. It was pleased that the Commission had decided to discontinue the pilot study on pay-for-performance and to update its performance management framework. Most organizations needed to improve their performance management systems to ensure that they were linked to competency development and career advancement.

18. Regarding the education grant methodology, the working group established to study that issue, which had comprised members of the Commission and representatives of the organizations and the staff associations, as well as of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and ICSC secretariats, had proposed a new system aimed primarily at cost-cutting. Finding that proposal unsatisfactory, the staff and human resources representatives had put forward a counter-proposal, which the ICSC secretariat had subsequently changed. The Federation disagreed with the assertions made in paragraph 42 of the ICSC report, particularly the statement that "most of the issues raised had been accommodated by the working group's revised proposal".

19. FICSA was pleased that the Commission had decided to maintain the current education grant methodology for the time being. It welcomed the increases in the maximum education grant but regretted that, in most cases, they were not as high as the Human Resources Network had recommended.

20. With respect to the evolution of the United Nations/United States net remuneration margin and the base/floor salary scale, the Federation noted that the

margin for 2008 had been estimated at 114.1, with its five-year average (2004-2008) standing at 112.8. It also took note of the proposed 2.33-per-cent increase for Professional salaries on a no loss/no gain basis.

21. FICSA supported the recommendation to increase the hardship, mobility and non-removal allowances by 5 per cent and to continue adjusting the amounts of those allowances according to changes in the personal status of the staff member or in the hardship classification of the duty station. Any further review of the allowances should focus on their impact on mobility and on staff.

22. The Federation was deeply concerned about the Organization's failure to achieve gender balance and urged ICSC to identify the reasons for the high voluntary attrition rate among women. In that connection, it fully supported spouse employment initiatives.

23. FICSA did not agree with the Commission's decision to set the children's allowance as a global flat-rate amount, nor was it satisfied with the transitional arrangements, as they would result in lower allowances for staff at certain locations. It would have preferred the phased-in approach proposed by the Human Resources Network.

24. Because only about 10 per cent of staff outside headquarters duty stations and category A and B duty stations had replied to the Commission's survey on the impact of recruitment and retention measures at difficult duty stations, FICSA questioned the validity of the Commission's analysis. It strongly urged the General Assembly to request ICSC to follow up on the complaint by staff that they were unable to use their skills and competencies and to identify the reasons for the high turnover rate among locally recruited staff.

25. Regarding the Senior Management Network, the Federation appreciated the efforts to improve leadership in the United Nations system and recommended that training programmes for senior managers should include a component on labour relations.

26. With respect to the appreciation of local currencies and its effects on staff remuneration at group II duty stations, wages and benefits should allow staff to meet living costs at their duty station as well as financial commitments in their home country or elsewhere. FICSA regretted the Commission's

conclusion that no change in the operational rules governing the three components of the remuneration package (post adjustment, education grant and mobility and hardship scheme) was currently warranted.

27. Lastly, the Federation supported the Commission's decisions regarding post adjustment questions and welcomed the proposed 5-per-cent increase in hazard pay for internationally recruited staff.

28. **Mr. Jumet** (Vice-President, United Nations International Civil Servants Federation) said that the views of the United Nations International Civil Servants Federation (UNISERV) on the reform proposals in the Secretary-General's report on streamlining United Nations contractual arrangements (A/62/274), human resources issues in the context of the reform of the internal system of administration of justice (A/63/132) and recruitment and staffing in the United Nations (A/63/285) had been expressed in detail in document A/C.5/63/3/Add.2. However, he wished to further highlight several issues.

29. The results of the salary surveys in Geneva and Vienna had been disappointing because an inadequate number of employers with the best conditions of service on the local labour market had participated. UNISERV would remain actively involved in the working group established by ICSC to find a more equitable solution based on the Flemming principle. In the meantime, the Secretariat should take account of the negative impact of the surveys concerned on staff in Geneva and Vienna. While UNISERV acknowledged the challenges of the current economic situation, immediate solutions must be sought to ease the burden on staff at duty stations where currency fluctuations, high inflation and failed economies had caused a crisis.

30. With regard to the proposed changes to the funding of after-service health insurance, active staff should be spared any additional burden which would further erode their conditions of service. The key to solvency in the after-service health insurance system was careful, long-term planning. With regard to the safety and security of staff, the lessons learned from the Baghdad and Algiers bombings should be applied. Hazard pay of \$65 per month was no substitute for protecting staff in the discharge of their functions. Member States should provide the resources needed to achieve that objective. Staff selected for safety and security posts should demonstrate competence and

experience in that area, and be held fully accountable for their performance.

31. Harmonization of conditions of service would receive the support of UNISERV provided that its basis was sound. Uniform criteria for recruitment must be in place and adhered to throughout the common system. The goal of achieving gender parity remained distant because of inadequate implementation of existing policies. Host countries should facilitate employment of spouses, as lack of attention to that issue had been one of the main obstacles to recruiting women in the Professional and higher categories.

32. The introduction of the new administration of justice system was positive, and all the funding necessary for it to be in place by 1 January 2009 should be provided. Accountability in human resources management depended on the existence of an effective, independent and impartial justice system incorporating fundamental labour standards.

33. Finally, UNISERV hoped that the Committee would see the benefits of closing the growing gap between the Organization's mandates and its resources, either by increasing funding or by bringing mandates into line with available resources.

34. **Mr. Hunte** (Antigua and Barbuda), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said that the Group would pay close attention to the findings of the global staff survey regarding recruitment and retention in the organizations of the United Nations system, carried out by ICSC in 2008. It would like to isolate the results which applied specifically to the United Nations in order to understand the problems to be addressed by the General Assembly. The Group would also take account of the views of the United Nations system staff associations, and thanked ICSC for its observations, particularly on policies for achieving gender balance. As gender-sensitive policies and efforts to improve the representation of women had not achieved the expected results, the Group concurred with ICSC that those policies must be enforced and monitored.

35. While salaries were not a paramount consideration for most United Nations staff, who generally wanted to stay with the Organization because they believed in its goals and objectives, they needed respectable pay, accompanied by sufficient incentives, in order to work effectively in a rapidly changing world. The Group concurred with the ICSC

recommendation that the current base/floor salary scale for staff in the Professional and higher categories should be adjusted, and that hardship, mobility and non-removal allowances should be increased as from 1 January 2009. In the informal consultations on the report, the Group would like further clarification of the proposed changes to the education grant methodology and of the review of the level of the children's and secondary dependant's allowances, particularly in the light of the reservations expressed by the staff associations.

36. The Group hoped that ICSC would continue to play a pivotal role in developing a Senior Management Network and in evaluating the senior management leadership programme. It regretted the failure of the pilot study on broad banding/pay-for-performance in the five volunteer organizations, and would like more details of the reasons for that failure and the lessons that could be learned from it.

37. **Mr. Sutter** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union, said that the core questions to be addressed by the Organization, in the interest of improving management, included the effectiveness and impact of recruitment and retention measures, especially at difficult duty stations; the mobility/hardship scheme; and gender parity.

38. While recognizing that ICSC had had no choice but to discontinue the pilot study on broad banding/pay-for-performance, the European Union hoped that the lessons learned from the study, particularly with regard to the assessment and acknowledgement of staff performance, would be shared with the Member States. Recalling that the General Assembly, in its two most recent resolutions on the United Nations common system, had asked the Secretary-General to urge the common-system organizations to provide ICSC with information relevant to its work, the European Union would like details, in the informal consultations, of the steps taken to fulfil that request.

39. Lastly, the European Union had noted that the Advisory Committee did not object to the Secretary-General's proposed approach to accommodating the programme budget implications of the decisions and recommendations of ICSC.

40. **Ms. Pataca** (Angola), speaking on behalf of the Group of African States, said that the Group commended ICSC for its efforts to find ways of

simplifying entitlements and rewarding exceptional performance in the United Nations system. It supported the ICSC recommendations regarding the education grant, the hardship, mobility and non-removal allowances and the children's and secondary dependant's allowances. It shared the disappointment expressed by ICSC at the lack of progress in attaining gender balance in the United Nations common system, especially in senior posts, and hoped that the organizations in the system would implement the ICSC recommendations in that regard.

41. Noting with interest the interim results of the global staff survey carried out to consider the effectiveness and impact of measures to promote recruitment and retention, especially at difficult duty stations, the Group looked forward to receiving guidance regarding the occupational groups for which recruitment and retention were difficult. As it supported an effective international civil service, the Group remained interested in staff motivation and productivity and hoped that ICSC would inform the Member States of the lessons learned from the discontinued pilot study on broad banding/pay-for-performance.

42. **Ms. Vasile** (Mexico), speaking on behalf of the Rio Group, said that the Group supported the enhancement of transparency and administrative simplicity in the education grant methodology. In the informal consultations, it wished to learn more about the concerns of the representatives of the United Nations system organizations and staff, and about matters connected with duty stations and representative schools.

43. The results of the global staff survey regarding recruitment and retention would contribute significantly to the discussions on the reform of human resources management. The Group encouraged ICSC to continue conducting staff surveys in that connection. Although the survey provided an overview of the situation in the United Nations system as a whole, disaggregated data would yield a better understanding of individual circumstances.

44. The Group encouraged participating organizations to implement the ICSC recommendations regarding the achievement of gender balance. It regretted the decision of ICSC to discontinue the pilot study on broad banding/pay-for-performance, as the Group believed that the exercise had merit. It would

like further details in the informal consultations regarding the basis of pay-for-performance in organizations outside the United Nations system.

45. **Mr. Cram** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said that the three delegations were encouraged by the efforts of ICSC to strengthen and streamline its working methods. They had a keen interest in the pilot study on broad banding/pay-for-performance, taking the view that such tools could strengthen performance-based human resources management. The General Assembly should be given a fuller account of the reasons for the study's failure, including the way in which the project had been managed. It should also be given details of how the issues investigated by the Office of Internal Oversight Services had affected the conduct of the study.

46. If the organizations of the United Nations system were to remain effective and progressive, the relevance of strengthening managers' capacities must not be underestimated. The delegations looked forward to the full establishment of the Senior Management Network. Noting the ICSC observations on the practical problems associated with the revised mobility and hardship scheme, the delegations wondered if those problems could not have been foreseen. However, they saw merit in the course of action proposed by ICSC.

47. Having noted the work of the Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions, in particular its review of the results of an out-of-area survey conducted by the ICSC secretariat, the three delegations wondered to what extent the significant increase in the post adjustment for New York had been driven by out-of-area factors. While appreciating ICSC efforts to simplify and modernize the methodology for determining the education grant, they would like clarification of the areas of disagreement between ICSC and the Human Resources Network, and an indication of the way forward.

48. **Mr. Kovalenko** (Russian Federation) said that his delegation appreciated the work of ICSC on salaries and allowances in the United Nations system. It had taken note of the decision to discontinue the broad-banding/pay-for-performance pilot study and to develop a framework for performance-enhancing measures that could be used across the system. The Commission should bear in mind, however, that the General Assembly had not authorized the application

within the United Nations itself of earlier recommendations by the Commission that common-system organizations should consider the judicious use of monetary bonuses. Any pilot project on performance management measures developed by the Commission must remain strictly within the framework of the common system and, crucially, must not breach its rules. The proposal by the United Nations Development Programme on conditions of service for resident coordinators, for example, had clearly run counter to the rules in effect in the common system; the Commission had acknowledged, in its report on the work of its sixty-seventh session (ICSC/67/R.15), that the proposal was inappropriate for the system. Furthermore, all such schemes must be submitted to the General Assembly for approval before being implemented.

49. His delegation also welcomed the Commission's intention to use the possibilities afforded by the existing compensation system by issuing guidelines on the granting of steps based on merit, rather than automatically. Work on other major aspects of salaries, allowances and benefits should focus on modernizing and simplifying them. It was unfortunate that, despite significant efforts, ICSC had ultimately failed to decide on a revised methodology for determining the education grant.

50. The Commission's efforts to act as a modern management instrument at the service of Member States and the United Nations, and to become a partner to the organizations of the United Nations system, were commendable. In his view, however, a greater degree of trilateralism had begun to appear in the work of the Commission, particularly through the increased decision-making power of the trilateral working groups, in which staff and organization representatives participated along with Commission members. Those groups would be considering a number of crucial issues in the near future, including salaries for General Service staff and separation payments, and in so doing must conform to the principle of the trilateral consultation (not negotiation) process, according to which decisions were taken solely by the members of the Commission without the participation of staff or organization representatives.

51. The Commission played a central role in the international civil service by harmonizing salaries, allowances and conditions of service. That was important to Member States not only because it

ensured pay equity for staff throughout the United Nations system, but also because it allowed those organizations to function efficiently. There was no competition among them in terms of salaries and allowances, as had occurred in the United Nations funds and programmes when they had established separate terms for allowances at non-family duty stations.

52. Most importantly, while salaries at the United Nations must be sufficiently high to attract qualified staff members, they must also take into account the financial capacities of Member States. It was therefore essential to assess, with a good measure of realism, the staffing needed to perform the tasks set out for the Organization, and how much Member States were prepared to pay for staff. The Commission had an invaluable role to play in finding a balance between needs and equitable conditions of service on the one hand, and the Member States' actual capacity to pay on the other.

53. **Mr. Scanlon** (United States of America) commended ICSC, and all those with a stake in the common system, for their contributions to the 2008 global staff survey, which would provide valuable data for making informed decisions.

54. His delegation was concerned about the continued lack of progress on the review of the education grant methodology. On the children's and secondary dependant's allowances, he would have to be convinced that the recommended methodology was appropriate if the higher allowances that would result from its application added to budget requirements.

55. Noting the report's indication that the broad-banding/pay-for-performance pilot study, as originally conceived, had been discontinued, he asked whether the study was being halted or redesigned. He strongly concurred that managers must be held accountable for achieving gender targets; they should also be held responsible for meeting geographic distribution targets.

56. His delegation commended the Commission on its programme of work for 2009-2010 and looked forward to continued progress on issues such as human resources management, performance management and standards of conduct. He urged the Commission to enlist the help of Member States in encouraging all organizations of the common system to comply with its requests for timely data to assist in its important work.

57. **Mr. Kishimoto** (Japan) said that, in line with the usual practice, the ICSC recommendations on basic salary levels for the Professional category and above should be approved without change. Periodic reviews of various allowances were necessary to reflect the movement of the salary scale or inflation. However, the review of the methodology for calculating allowances should be aimed at ensuring cost-neutrality. If additional resources were requested, there must be good reason for the changes in methodology and such changes must be approved by the General Assembly before they were put into effect.

58. He asked why the proposed new scheme of children's and secondary dependant's allowances would yield an outrageous increase of 50 per cent, from \$1,780 to \$2,686 per annum. The Commission's recommendations in the current year did not seem to accord with the view expressed in its 2006 report to the General Assembly (A/61/30), in which it had stated that the methodology for determining dependency allowances should be considered in a comprehensive manner. The ongoing methodological reviews of the education grant and the mobility/hardship scheme should also be carried out comprehensively.

59. The discussion of the conditions of service of General Service and other locally recruited staff, contained in paragraphs 139 and 144 of the current report (A/63/30), was confusing: it stated that the recommended salary scale was lower than the scale in effect, but that its implementation was not expected to have financial implications. Had the scale in effect been reduced, or had the scale recommended by ICSC not been adopted, even if it reflected the best prevailing local conditions of employment?

60. His delegation commended those involved in conducting the global staff survey, which would prove useful in streamlining contracts and harmonizing conditions of service. It would be interesting to compare the strengths and weaknesses of the current system, ideally with disaggregated data for each fund, programme and peacekeeping operation.

61. ICSC would continue to play a key role in guiding the entities under the common system towards more coherent and effective management. It should play a more active role in recruitment policies and in improving performance management, which was a prerequisite for introducing new contractual arrangements.

62. **Mr. Debabeche** (Algeria) said that his delegation continued to believe that the role of ICSC should not be limited to reviewing salaries: the Commission should be the point of departure for all issues pertaining to human resources.

63. **Mr. Shen Yanjie** (China) said that the Commission's efforts to reform salaries and allowances in the common system through the broad-banding/pay-for-performance pilot project were appreciated. He looked forward to further study and recommendations in the next phase, which should lay the foundation for a more scientific remuneration system.

64. The goal of achieving gender balance should be included in performance evaluations in order to motivate those responsible for its implementation. On the subject of recruiting and retaining staff for hardship duty stations, he noted that current salaries were competitive. Other incentives, such as the work environment, the organizations' reputation and the possibility of advancement, all played a part and should be given close attention.

65. Commenting on the Senior Management Network, he noted that developing core leadership capabilities would improve the work culture, communication among organizations, staff mobility and professional management of staff. Clear criteria should be applied in selecting Network members, based on posts and the terms of reference, to ensure an objective and pragmatic selection process while also maintaining the principle of gender parity.

66. His delegation was gratified to see that the Commission had adopted a more proactive approach by working with partners and undertaking strategic planning, which would result in the streamlining of procedures and more efficient use of resources.

Other matters

67. **Mr. Kovalenko** (Russian Federation) said that he wished to draw the attention of the Secretariat, and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management in particular, to problems with the quality of the Russian-English interpretation. The Secretariat should take measures to ensure that interpreters adhered to the terminology used in the reports under consideration.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.