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PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1976-1977 JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

Report on some aspects of the strike at the United Nations
Office at Geneva from 25 February to 3 March 1976

Note by the Secretary-General

Addendum

1. The Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), transmits herewith the joint comments of ACC on the report submitted by the Joint Inspection Unit on some aspects of the strike at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 25 February to 3 March 1976 (A/31/137).
2. The comments of the Secretary-General pertaining to the recommendations which have not been dealt with by ACC in its joint comments will be transmitted in a further note in the near future.

ANNEX

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

1. In its report (JIU/REP/76/6, submitted to the General Assembly in document A/31/137) on some aspects of the strike which took place at the United Nations Office at Geneva earlier this year, the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), in paragraph 80, makes a number of recommendations (Nos. 1, 2 and 5) relating to the operation of the United Nations common system of salaries and allowances and, consequently, involves the responsibilities of the executive heads of all the organizations participating in it. In view of these broader implications of the report, the Secretary-General and his colleagues in the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) have agreed upon the following comments for submission to the Assembly and the competent organs of the specialized agencies concerned.
2. This report, taken as a whole, brings to light difficulties which have arisen in determining the salaries of staff in the General Service category in certain duty stations and which are acknowledged. Indeed, the need to refine the method was already brought to the attention of the Special Committee for the Review of the United Nations Salary System (A/AC.150/8) in 1971. At the same time ACC reached the conclusion, and so reported to the Special Committee that the efficient operation of the common system required the establishment of an International Civil Service Commission which would assist in regulating and co-ordinating the conditions of service of the staff. In January of this year, as part of its documentation for the present phase of the salary review, the Committee proposed that the policies and procedures governing the fixing of General Service salaries and allowances should be revised at an early date. It further suggested that the Commission might wish to draft a set of rules for general application, together with specific procedures to take account of local conditions at the different duty stations, in advance of its assuming, in accordance with its statute and the relevant decision of the General Assembly, formal responsibility for General Service salaries and allowances.

Recommendation No. 1

3. Among the issues dealt with in the report is the manner in which the salaries and allowances of the staff in the General Service category are to be determined. As a result of its investigation, JIU concluded that the method currently being used in applying the existing principles for the determination of those salaries and allowances - the agreed interagency guidelines which have come to be known as "the guiding principles for the determination of the conditions of service of the General Service category" - is defective in several respects and should be replaced. JIU accordingly recommended that "a draft regulation on the method of applying the principles of the 'best prevailing conditions of employment' should be prepared" and that it "should be submitted, after consideration by the International Civil Service Commission, to the United Nations General Assembly for approval as soon as possible" (A/31/137, para. 80, recommendation No. 1).

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4. In this connexion, ACC draws attention to the wording of article 11 (a) of the statute of the Commission (General Assembly resolution 3357 (XXIX), annex), which states:

"The Commission shall establish:

"(a) The methods by which the principles for determining conditions of service should be applied".

ACC therefore recommends that the Commission should be requested, in the exercise of its functions under article 11, to undertake, as part of its work programme for 1977, a study of the methods by which the principles for determining conditions of service for the General Service category should be applied.

5. In response to the ACC proposal that the Commission might wish to draft a set of rules of general application and having regard to the priority task assigned to it by the General Assembly in 1975 and to the requests addressed to it by the World Health Assembly and the Governing Body of the International Labour Office in May 1976 after the salary settlement in Geneva, the Commission decided to assume its functions under article 12 of the statute in respect of the salary scales of the General Service and other locally recruited categories at the headquarters duty stations "from the close of its fourth session". a/ It has already taken steps, in consultation with the executive heads of the organizations and the staff representatives, to study the issues that have arisen in the application of the present method of setting General Service salaries and intends to advance the date at which it will be able to concern itself with the situation in particular duty stations.

6. In the course of the Commission's consideration of this question towards the end of its fourth session in July of this year, the representatives of ACC informed the Commission of the arrangements they were making to assist it in accelerating the assumption of the functions set out in article 12 of the statute. The Committee believes that the procedures laid down in the statute for dealing with the conditions of service of staff, involving as they do system-wide studies and co-operation with all concerned, are best designed to enable all organizations to give effect to the Inspectors' recommendation.

Recommendation No. 2

7. Of general interest to the United Nations common system as a whole is also the second recommendation of the Inspectors (A/31/137, para. 80), which deals with the early application of article 12, paragraph 1, of the statute, the possible application of paragraph 2 of that article or, alternatively, its amendment.

a/ See Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 30 (A/31/30 and Add.1), paras. 27-29 and 333-337.

Taking as a point of departure the finding that, in Geneva, consultations on salary matters are inherently difficult because they involve seven administrations and seven staff associations, the Inspectors recommend that the executive heads of the Geneva-based organizations consider invoking article 12, paragraph 2, of the statute so that the Commission may determine the salary scales of the General Service staff in Geneva, or that the General Assembly consider the possibility of requesting them to do so or of amending the article.

8. As explained in the comments on the draft statute of the International Civil Service Commission (A/9147 and Corr.1), as first submitted to the General Assembly in 1973, the issues arising in the determination of the salaries of General Service staff by reference to local conditions are many and varied. Because there are 600 duty stations spread in 150 countries and territories, some of which have significant numbers of General Service staff who are fully aware of local practices and traditions, and because it is unrealistic to assume that a central commission, however competent, could deal effectively with all the duty stations, the statute contains four interrelated provisions:

(a) It introduces a gradual approach to the function of setting pay for General Service staff (article 12, paras. 1 and 4);

(b) It envisages certain functions in this area being carried out on behalf of the Commission by the organizations (article 27, second sentence);

(c) It distinguishes between the fact-finding and recommendation function, on the one hand (article 12, para. 1), and that of determining pay on the other (article 12, para. 2);

(d) It requires the Commission, in exercising these functions, to consult executive heads and staff representatives (article 12, para. 3, and article 28).

9. This deliberate and balanced approach to the task of administering a global system of pay with all its diversity has yet to be tested in practice. It would therefore seem premature to raise the question of invoking paragraph 2 of article 12 of the statute. Should satisfactory results not be achieved after the Commission had (a) considered the preliminary question of the adequacy or otherwise of the existing arrangements and (b) exercised the function of fact-finding and recommendation, under paragraph 1 of article 12, in respect of Geneva, the issues arising out of the present text of article 12 of the statute would then be ripe for review.

10. ACC does not believe that it would be appropriate at this state to comment in detail on this recommendation. It shares the view of the executive heads of the Geneva-based organizations that, since the Commission has already responded to the requests addressed to it, in May of this year, by the World Health Assembly and the Governing Body of the International Labour Office, the Commission is the proper place for the various questions raised in the Inspectors' report to be examined. The account, given in the report, of the last salary survey in Geneva, and the observations accompanying it, will help the Commission in discharging the

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responsibilities entrusted to it under the statute with respect to that duty station. The Commission will also be able, because of the procedures governing its work, to distinguish between the problems relating only to Geneva and the broader issues affecting the common system as a whole.

Recommendation No. 5

11. The third issue of relevance to the operation of the common system is that which is dealt with in recommendation No. 5 (A/31/137, para. 80). In it, the Inspectors propose that the structure of the General Service salary scale - apparently not just in Geneva - should be reformed in order to increase the difference in pay between grades, to reduce the number of grades from seven to five and to re-establish a reasonable relationship between General Service and Professional salaries and pensions.

12. That some of the matters covered in this recommendation are of considerable significance to all organizations is evident from the submissions they have made over the years to several reviewing bodies. While recognizing that the application of two separate salary systems, one for the General Service category and one for the Professional category, inevitably leads to different rates of increase and, hence, to changing relationships between them, ACC has nevertheless brought the matter to the attention of the Commission. As part of its review of the salary system, the Commission has included in its report a comparison of the remuneration of the two categories at six of the headquarters duty stations b/ and has decided to examine the levels of pensionable remuneration in the context of its projected study of pension benefits as an element of total compensation. The Inspectors' suggestion, in paragraph 70 of the report (A/31/137), that the reform of the General Service salary structure should be carried out by the Commission may therefore be regarded as consistent with the Commission's own work programme although it will clearly not be possible for it to do so in the space of a few months.

13. In line with these comments on the Inspectors' recommendations concerning the common system, the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination suggests that the General Assembly should:

(a) Endorse the decision of the International Civil Service Commission to advance the assumption of its functions under article 12 of the statute; c/

(b) Request the Commission to include in its work programme for 1977 both the general questions relating to the method by which the principles for determining conditions of service for the General Service category should be applied under article 11 (a) of its statute and the specific question of General Service salaries and allowances in Geneva under article 12, paragraph 1, of the statute;

(c) Refer to the Commission for its study the report of the Joint Inspection Unit on some aspects of the strike at the United Nations Office at Geneva from 25 February to 3 March 1976 (A/31/137).

b/ Ibid., annex IX.

c/ Ibid., para. 29.