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Improvement of the status of women in the SecretariatReport of the Secretary-General

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INTRODUCTION

1. This is the fifth in a series of reports responding to the mandate to improve the status of women in the United Nations Secretariat. The first three reports (A/C.5/40/30, A/C.5/41/18 and A/C.5/42/24) described the measures adopted to improve the status of women in the United Nations Secretariat. The fourth report (A/C.5/43/14) described the developments that had taken place between October 1987 and September 1988. This fifth report outlines developments during the past year.
2. By means of a Bulletin (ST/SGB/216/Add.1 of 27 March 1989), the Secretary-General informed the staff of the composition of the Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat for the period 27 March 1989 to 31 December 1990. Owing to time constraints the Committee decided to submit an interim report on its activities up to August 1989 (ST/SGB/232), and to submit further periodical reports on the substance of its mandate thereafter. The Committee's interim report included a recommendation on the appeals and requests for reclassification arising from the General Service reclassification exercise as well as the restructuring of the secretarial occupations so as to ensure a fair distribution of posts at all levels.
3. With regard to organizational aspects for improving the status of women within the Secretariat, the Secretary-General informed the staff on the occasion of International Women's Day on 8 March 1989 that a senior woman had been selected at the D-1 level as the focal point in the office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management for questions relating to women in the Secretariat. By this means, the continuation of the work of the former office of the Co-ordinator for the improvement of the status of women would be ensured and the task of monitoring and facilitating the improvement of the status of women would be integrated into the management of human resources. In addition, the Secretary-General made known the fact that he had appointed two more women at the level of director, one of whom, as part of his Executive Office, would, among other functions, follow all questions relating to women in the Secretariat and keep him informed of any matters requiring his attention.

I. CURRENT SITUATION

A. Women in posts subject to geographical distribution

4. Despite the continuing retrenchment programme mandated by the General Assembly, which reduced the total number of posts by 12 per cent, the number of women in the United Nations Secretariat increased slightly. As at 30 June 1989 the percentage of women in posts subject to geographical distribution stood at 26.9 per cent, compared with 26.3 per cent at 30 June 1988 and 25.7 per cent at 30 June 1987. In 1985, the 30 June figure stood at 23.1 per cent. Table 1 gives statistics on women in posts subject to geographic distribution. Most noteworthy is the increase in the number of women staff at the director (D-2) level.

Table 1

Number and percentage of women in posts subject
to geographical distribution

| Level | 30 June 1987 | | 30 June 1988 | | 30 June 1989 | |
|-------|--------------|------|--------------|------|--------------|------|
| | No. | % | No. | % | No. | % |
| USG | 2 | 7.7 | 2 | 7.7 | 2 | 8.3 |
| ASG | 2 | 9.1 | 1 | 5.3 | 0 | 0 |
| D-2 | 2 | 2.4 | 5 | 5.7 | 7 | 8.2 |
| D-1 | 24 | 10.5 | 19 | 8.6 | 15 | 6.4 |
| P-5 | 54 | 11.4 | 59 | 12.4 | 64 | 13.5 |
| P-4 | 149 | 22.2 | 162 | 23.3 | 170 | 24.5 |
| P-3 | 238 | 34.9 | 251 | 39.0 | 263 | 40.3 |
| P-2 | 165 | 45.2 | 137 | 43.2 | 141 | 44.9 |
| P-1 | 30 | 71.4 | 27 | 73.0 | 17 | 58.6 |

B. Career development opportunities for women

5. The Vacancy Management and Staff Redeployment Programme has now been in effect for nearly three years. It was designed to introduce a completely open system with regard to the advertisement of posts and to fill posts at duty stations with high vacancy rates. The percentage of promotions for women under the vacancy management system is higher than the 30 per cent target, with respect to promotions to P-2 through P-5. It has had a twofold impact on staff: more apply for vacancies and are promoted and more staff choose to serve at other duty stations. Since the inception of vacancy management, out of a total of 77 staff who moved between duty stations, 29 or 37.7 per cent were women.

6. By department or office the number of women moving to posts through the Vacancy Management and Staff Redeployment Programme varies. Out of 47 staff movements in the Department of Public Information 20, or 42 per cent, were women. In the Department of International, Economic and Social Affairs, the comparable figures are 5 women, or 29 per cent of the total 17 who moved. Sixteen posts were filled in the Department of Technical Co-operation for Development, four of them, or 25 per cent, by women. Three women, or 27 per cent of a total of 11 staff, were selected by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). Eight posts were filled through vacancy management in the Department of Political and Security Council Affairs, four, or 50 per cent, were women; and in the Office of Legal Affairs the percentage is 47, or 8 out of 17.

7. A comparison with the old system of promotion is given below in table 2. The years 1982-1986 illustrate the old system. A limited review only took place during 1987, and 1988-1989 covers the period during which vacancy management was fully operational. The overall numbers of those promoted are much fewer owing to retrenchment. It should be noted that a greater number of cuts occurred at the higher levels, P-5, D-1 and above.

8. The 1988-1989 column, which covers the Vacancy Management and Redeployment Programme shows that, while the percentage of women at the P-3 level who were promoted to P-4 is approximately proportional to their distribution in the P-3 ranks, the percentage of women at the P-4 level who were promoted to P-5 significantly exceeds the percentage share of the P-4 population, e.g., 36 per cent promoted against 24.5 per cent in the P-4 group. As shown in table I the P-4 population is 170. In this respect, the vacancy system would appear to be an effective tool for the advancement of women into management positions.

9. Career path handbooks are under preparation for both the Professional and the General Service and related categories of staff. The handbook for the General Service staff and related categories will be finalized in 1990.

Table 2

Promotions of Professional staff occupying post subject to geographic distribution, by sex and grade, 1982-1986, 1987 and 1988-1989

| Level | 1982-1986 a/ | | | 1987 b/ | | | 1988-1989 c/ | | |
|-------|--------------|--------|------------|-------------------|------|--------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| | Male | Female | Both sexes | Percentage female | Male | Female | Both sexes | Percentage female | Percentage female |
| P-1 | 172 | 26 | 198 | 13.1 | 24 | 1 | 25 | 4 | 9.1 |
| P-5 | 396 | 124 | 520 | 23.8 | 39 | 7 | 46 | 15.2 | 36.0 |
| P-4 | 559 | 260 | 819 | 31.7 | 51 | 35 | 86 | 40.7 | 38.3 |
| P-3 | 259 | 252 | 511 | 49.3 | 23 | 25 | 48 | 52.1 | 37.5 |
| P-2 | 50 | 57 | 107 | 53.3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.0 | 66.7 |
| Total | 1 436 | 719 | 2 155 | 33.4 | 137 | 68 | 205 | 33.2 | 33.0 |

a/ Aggregate of regular promotion reviews, 1982-1986.

b/ Limited promotion review.

c/ Those promoted or to be promoted from 1 January 1988 through 31 December 1989 under vacancy management.

C. Distribution of women by region of origin

17. In terms of region of origin, the presence of women in posts subject to geographical distribution remains uneven. Although in percentage terms, all figures are higher than in 1988 (see table 3), the African, Middle Eastern and Eastern European regions remain seriously underrepresented. The continued co-operation of Governments from these regions is solicited in providing suitable women candidates.

Table 3

Professional staff in posts subject to geographical distribution, by region and gender as at 30 June 1988 and 30 June 1989

| Region | 1988 | | | 1989 | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------|-------|------|--------------|-------|------|
| | No. of staff | Women | % | No. of staff | Women | % |
| Africa | 424 | 51 | 12.0 | 427 | 52 | 12.2 |
| Asia and the Pacific | 420 | 132 | 31.4 | 412 | 133 | 32.3 |
| Eastern Europe | 249 | 14 | 5.6 | 261 | 20 | 7.7 |
| Western Europe | 569 | 174 | 30.6 | 572 | 178 | 31.1 |
| Latin America | 189 | 57 | 30.2 | 201 | 66 | 32.8 |
| Middle East | 122 | 21 | 17.2 | 119 | 22 | 18.5 |
| North America and the Caribbean | 524 | 206 | 39.3 | 509 | 202 | 39.7 |

D. Recruitment

11. During the past year, while the numbers recruited increased slightly, the rate of recruitment of women against posts subject to geographical distribution fell. Thirty six out of 134 or 26.9 per cent of newly appointed staff were women compared with 19 women or 28.8 per cent during the comparable period a year earlier. Of the 36 women appointed, 20 entered at the P-2 level, 11 at the P-3 and 5 at the P-4. There is clearly a need for more high-level appointments.

12. The Office of Human Resources Management has determined that in order to reach the target of 30 per cent women in the Secretariat by 1990, the Organization would have to recruit about 150 women between early 1989 and the end of 1990. About 31 women will reach retirement age in 1989 and 1990 and an estimated 37 women can be expected to leave the Organization for other reasons prior to the end of 1990. Currently, women make up 26.9 per cent, a shortfall of 3.1 per cent. The Office of Human Resources Management hopes to meet the target by means of national competitive examinations, the internal competitive examinations for promotion from

the General Service and related categories to Professional categories and direct recruitment. Thanks to the co-operation of Governments in encouraging more women candidates to sit for the examinations about 45 per cent of the successful candidates over the last three years have been women.

13. Recruitment missions, which were temporarily suspended in 1986 and to a large extent in 1987, have been resumed. These missions have emphasized the need for women candidates. Full use has been made of staff, whether travelling in connection with national competitive examinations or on other official business, to address government-sponsored meetings of professional women's groups to provide practical information concerning employment opportunities in the United Nations at the P-3 level and above. During the past year, such missions took place in the Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, China, the Dominican Republic, Greece, Hungary, Indonesia, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Luxembourg, Panama, Paraguay, Suriname, Turkey and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

14. In June 1989, all heads of departments and offices received a letter from the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management urging them to increase the number of women in posts subject to geographical distribution with a view to achieving, to the extent possible, the participation rate of 30 per cent by 1990. They were urged to review all existing and projected vacancies in their departments and to submit concrete proposals - including setting numerical targets - for increasing the number of Professional women in their departments. This exercise encompassed all levels in the Professional and higher categories.

15. In order to meet the 30 per cent target for women in the coming period, regular recruitment is targeted towards adding the required number of women to the staff. The Office of Human Resources Management is also investigating additional measures to increase the number of women in the Secretariat, among them: reviewing the files of Junior Professional Officers (JPOs) of other United Nations bodies and of Associate Experts with a view to adding women who are suitable to the Secretariat staff; regularization of staff members who meet certain criteria and who have been on short-term contracts for extended periods; permitting certain staff who have been serving effectively under the 200 series of Staff Rules, to apply for posts under the 100 series of Staff Rules; as well as some direct high-level appointments. The Office of Human Resources Management is also prepared to give favourable consideration to recommendations by department heads for extending qualified women staff members beyond the statutory retirement age, particularly when they can serve as replacements for staff who are on peace-keeping or peace-making missions.

E. Distribution across departments

16. The 1989 report of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat provides detailed statistical data on the distribution of women at each level by office or department (A/44/604). The distribution of women across various organizational units of the United Nations remains uneven (see table 4).

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Table 4

Number and percentage of women in posts subject to geographical distribution in the regional commissions and selected departments with vacancy rates above 10 per cent

| | <u>30 June 1988</u> | | <u>30 June 1989</u> | |
|---|---------------------|------------|---------------------|------------|
| | No. | Percentage | No. | Percentage |
| Economic Commission for Africa | 19 | 11.5 | 19 | 11.8 |
| Economic Commission for Europe | 9 | 9.0 | 10 | 10.2 |
| Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean | 20 | 16.4 | 19 | 16.5 |
| Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia | 10 | 14.9 | 8 | 12.5 |
| Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific | 31 | 22.5 | 27 | 20.6 |
| United Nations Conference on Trade and Development | 32 | 13.9 | 32 | 15.2 |
| United Nations Centre for Human Settlements | 13 | 28.9 | 14 | 31.1 |
| World Food Council | 2 | 18.2 | 1 | 14.3 |
| United Nations Environment Programme | 2 | 10.5 | 3 | 14.3 |

F. Participation in missions

17. The huge operation in Namibia has given the opportunity to over 800 staff to serve the Organization and assist in a peaceful transition of Namibia to independence. Of the approximately 800 staff serving in the United Nations Transitional Assistance Group (UNTAG), 45.1 per cent are women. Two are senior officers in the Office of the Special Representative, three serve as directors of regional offices and three as heads of district offices. In phase I of the United Nations Observer Mission for the Verification of Electoral Process in Nicaragua (ONUVEN) mission, 42 per cent of the staff are women including one at the Senior Officer level.

18. As a result of these missions, much broader opportunities have been created for the staff who remain to be exposed to higher levels of decision-making until the mission staff return. This has afforded short-term career opportunities for a significant number of women.

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II. PROGRESS MADE DURING THE FOURTH YEAR OF THE ACTION PROGRAMME

A. Institutional arrangements

19. Over three years have elapsed since the inception of the Action Programme for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat. During the first phase, the Co-ordinator, together with the Steering Committee, identified obstacles that impeded the advancement of women in the Organization and submitted some 50 policy recommendations. The second phase, now in progress, is concerned with the implementation of these recommendations.

20. The person acting as focal point for questions relating to women in the Office of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management took up her assignment in mid-April 1989. An anticipated result of this assignment is that the task of monitoring and facilitating the improvement of the status of women will be integrated into all activities relating to human resources management. The focal point also serves as the Secretary to the Steering Committee for the Improvement of the Status of Women in the Secretariat. This Committee, composed of senior women and men appointed by the Secretary-General, monitors progress made and provides guidance through reports and recommendations to the Secretary-General.

B. Implementation

1. Action taken on the measures approved upon recommendation of the Steering Committee

21. During the period April to August 1989, the Steering Committee met five times and submitted an interim report to the Secretary-General with one recommendation. The Steering Committee felt that there were two matters concerning the General Service and related categories that the Organization should address promptly. They recommended that there be a speedy and fair resolution of the outstanding appeals and requests for reclassification arising from the General Service reclassification exercise, and that the secretarial occupation be restructured so as to ensure a fair distribution of posts at all levels. The Appeals and Review Committee will continue its work of examining the remaining cases. With regard to the secretarial occupation, bench-mark job descriptions for the secretarial occupation at the GS-3 to the GS-6 levels have been promulgated by the Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC).

2. Status report on the implementation of the action programme

22. The number of women in the Secretariat in Professional posts subject to geographical distribution has risen to 26.9 per cent despite the fact that the period 1988-1989 marks the crucial final phase of the retrenchment exercise, with resulting limitations imposed on recruitment. Because of retrenchment, it has not been possible to establish targets for the recruitment of women by department and level. However, realistic targets to meet the overall 30 per cent goal by end 1990 have been set. These include over the two-year period 1989-1990: approximately

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20 women entering the Professional ranks as a result of the G-to-P examinations; about 40 women coming through the national competitive examinations; about 85 women by means of regular recruitment, regularization from short-term to regular contracts, extensions beyond the retirement age of 60, appointments from the JPO ranks, conversion from the 200 series to the 100 series of Staff Rules, and some high-level appointments.

23. Four more women who had served on a succession of short-term contracts have been added to the nine reported in document A/C.5/43/14, paragraph 14 (c). Fewer 11-month contracts are now given.

24. Personnel rosters have been restructured in collaboration with substantive departments to reflect more accurately the occupational expertise required.

25. The practice of Secretariat briefings of Member States on recruitment in order to elicit greater numbers of women candidates has been continued in the past 12 months and has been expanded to include campaigns in 15 countries (see para. 13).

26. As a result of the development of strategies to increase the numbers of women taking the national competitive examinations, the percentage of successful women candidates brought on board for the last three examinations were as follows: 11 in 1985, and 10 in 1987; in 1988, 14 came on board, and 7 will join within the next three months.

27. In addition to the mandatory advertisement of vacancies throughout the Secretariat, departments and offices have been urged not only to release women for peace-making operations where Professional experience may be enhanced, but also to give every opportunity to women to replace staff on these missions. These temporary replacement assignments provide qualified women with the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities for future career assignments.

28. Two handbooks on career paths in the United Nations Secretariat are being prepared; one for staff in the General Service and related categories at Headquarters, and the other for staff in the Professional category. The publications, designed to help staff members to assess their career option in the Organization are components of the career development system for all categories of staff. Using the material in the relevant handbook staff members should be able to identify the duties and requirements of higher levels in their current occupational group and at what level they qualify for a job in another occupation. Since career advancement requires a match between a staff member's qualifications and the jobs available, the handbooks are designed to assist staff members in making informed decisions concerning their career goals. The handbook for General Service staff and related categories is in the final stages of review and will be distributed to staff members early in 1990. It will be adapted for staff at other duty stations. A handbook is being developed for the Professional category based on a similar format.

29. Bench-mark job descriptions for the secretarial occupation at the GS-3 to GS-6 levels have been completed and were promulgated by ICSC in June 1989.

Annex

IMPLEMENTATION STATUS OF THE 1988-1989 WORK PROGRAMME

1. Implementation of outstanding recommendations
contained in the Steering Committee's reports,
as approved by the Secretary-General

(a) Introduce and take action on the results of the comprehensive monitoring system;

Status: The Steering Committee and the Office of Human Resources Management are closely monitoring all departments and offices. The Office of Human Resources Management has urged directors and managers to review all existing and projected vacancies and to submit concrete proposals for increasing the number of women on their staffs.

(b) Utilize the vacancy management system to further the career development of women in all categories;

Status: The vacancy management programme is in place, and women have, during 1988-1989, moved in greater percentages to higher levels.

(c) Develop a staff rotation policy to ensure the effective use of human resources while eliminating perceived disincentives to mobility, particularly in the area of family life;

Status: In cases where staff are transferred to other duty stations special efforts are under way to transfer their spouses who are staff members through the vacancy management programme in order to maintain family units. A staff rotation and mobilization scheme based on occupational groups is being prepared for 1991 and will assist in furthering these efforts.

(d) Complete the development of a data base on skills inventories and career paths for women;

Status: The computerized data base on occupational characteristics of staff is still not fully completed. However, the Office of Human Resources Management has developed and routinely produces a great deal of statistical data, and approximate figures are already available.

(e) Further improve the job design of posts in the secretarial occupations;

Status: Bench-mark job descriptions for the secretarial support occupation from the GS-3 to GS-6 level were promulgated by the Chairman of ICSC.

(f) Develop occupational training programmes for General Service staff based on career path analysis;

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Status: In addition to increased training courses in electronic data processing, supervisory and managerial courses for staff in both the General Service and the Professional category have been expanded.

(g) Integrate the career development system for General Service staff with the examination and selection process for advancement to the Professional category;

Status: The handbook of career paths for General Service staff and related categories in the United Nations at Headquarters includes information on the G-to-P examination, the national recruitment examination and the competitive language examinations for advancement to the Professional category.

(h) Establish a system for part-time jobs and flexible working hours within the context of restructuring and the post reduction process;

Status: To date few staff members have come forward for part-time jobs, and experience so far is that departments are reluctant to accommodate this proposal in view of the reduction of posts. The Office of Human Resources Management plans to examine the issue.

(i) Introduce further measures aimed at avoiding gender discrimination and sexual harassment, both in the context of staff training and in the framework for the administration of justice;

Status: Cases brought to the attention of the administration are being addressed individually.

2. Improving career prospects of women at offices away from Headquarters

(a) Establish focal points at the various duty stations to follow up on issues related to career development;

Status: Not yet implemented.

(b) Evaluate data on the gender distribution of General Service staff by occupation and determine measures necessary to avoid any differences in career prospects;

Status: Now that job classification standards for General Service staff at offices away from Headquarters have been issued, preliminary investigations are being conducted with a view to undertaking this work.
