

FICSA CIRCULAR



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To: Chairs, Member Associations/Unions
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Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Standing Committees

From: Diab El-Tabari, President

**REPORT BY
THE FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS' ASSOCIATIONS (FICSA) ON
THE 82ND SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION (ICSC)¹**

(United Nations, New York, 7 to 18 March 2016)

The Federation was represented by Diab El-Tabari, Mauro Pace and Gaston Jordan (first week only) at the 82nd session of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) in New York from 7 to 11 March 2016. This session was characterized by clarifications on the way forward in implementing General Assembly Resolution 70/244 (United Nations common system: Report of the International Civil Service Commission), in particular the Review of the common system compensation package for staff in the Professional and higher categories and to lay the ground for the review of the compensation package for the General Service and other categories of staff in the common system.

During the first week, the staff federations met the ICSC Commissioners in a closed session; it was the opportunity to share views and concerns about the abuse of contracts in the so-called "non-staff", Field Service Staff and National Professional Officers (NPOs) categories.

Report of the Chair of the ICSC

The session opened with the report of the ICSC Chair, Mr. Kingston Rhodes, on the activities of the Commission since the previous session. The Commission then reviewed Resolution 70/244 and decisions adopted by the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, which had an impact on its work, namely the resolution containing the changes to the compensation package for the Professional and higher categories.

¹ For the "Statement by the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) and the Coordinating Committee of International Staff Unions and Associations (CCISUA) to the 82nd session of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC)" document FICSA/CIRC/1219 refers.

Although the FICSA and CCISUA representatives thanked the ICSC Secretariat for the presentation of the General Assembly decisions, and the Commissioners, organizations and Fifth Committee members for all the hard work and extensive time invested during the review of the compensation package for the Professional and higher categories, FICSA and CCISUA stated that they would be monitoring the changes and would be raising, for amendment, any discrepancies on acquired rights for staff. The staff federations informed the Commission that that would also be following up on any decisions which had an impact on service implementation and welfare of staff as they arose, such as the limitation of accelerated home leave.

Furthermore, FICSA and CCISUA stated that they would be looking forward to working further on performance appraisal and gender balance.

On the topic of mandatory age of separation (MAS), both FICSA and CCISUA were satisfied with the decision; however, they would have wished for an implementation date of 1 January 2017. It was therefore hoped that the organizations would not attempt to delay the MAS any further and implement it before 1 January 2018. The staff federations requested clarification concerning individual organizations' expected compliance with UN General Assembly decisions.

Finally, the staff federations remarked that although the General Assembly agreed to lift the freeze on allowances for General Service staff as of 1 January 2016, it is yet to be implemented in most organizations. The example of Madrid was given to support the observation.

Communication strategy

The ICSC Secretariat presented a communication strategy on the implementation of the changes to the compensation package which included a micro site built to provide the most precise information to the staff in the system. Among other features, the site contained two calculators to allow staff members to visualize the impact of the changes on their salary and allowances and to calculate the amount of education grant that they would receive under the revised scheme. The ICSC is about to officially launch the site, so there might still be changes to the format, but the essential information was already there ([http://commonsystem.org/cr/#<http://commonsystem.org/cr/\)>](http://commonsystem.org/cr/#<http://commonsystem.org/cr/)>)).

The three staff Federations appreciated the tools provided, reiterating the need for close cooperation at the local level, between administrations and staff representative bodies, to ensure maximum visibility and feedback for improvement.

Salary survey in Geneva

The survey of the best prevailing conditions of employment in Geneva was then reviewed. It should be pointed out that the last salary survey in Geneva yielded a negative result of -1.8%. Staff representatives argued that since the UN General Assembly had decided to lift the freeze on the General Service allowances as of 1 January 2016, the allowances should no longer be frozen. The ICSC was of the opinion that the survey took place during the freeze period hence the allowances should not be disclosed. A long debate ensued on the question and it was decided that the allowances would be disclosed and granted at the time of the September interim adjustment.

FICSA and CCISUA supported the letter sent by the staff representatives of the Local Salary Survey Committee (LSSC) and questioned the non-release of the calculation of dependency and language allowances. Both federations failed to understand the logic regarding the non-release of this information to the LSSC members and the implementation of the new calculations of the allowances as of 2016.

Since the freeze was lifted by the UN General Assembly as of 1 January 2016, the allowances should be adjusted accordingly. Staff representatives will seek legal guidance as to whether the implementation date for lifting the freeze should be 1 January 2016.

Overview of categories of staff in the UN

A most interesting topic discussed during this session was an exhaustive paper submitted by the ICSC Secretariat on staff categories and their use in the common system. It was deemed that such an analysis was necessary before embarking on the review of the compensation package for General Service staff and related categories. Staff representatives seized the opportunity to again raise the crucial issue of the use and abuse of (so-called) “non-staff” human resources to carry out core functions. Another area of concern was the fact that National Professional Officers were recruited locally but sometimes deployed to other countries, hence performing duties of internationally-recruited staff. A third area of concern was the grading of Field Service Staff.

Such practices were contrary to the principles on which the remuneration scheme in the UN was based and contributed to eroding conditions of employment throughout the system. It was recalled that only the use of proper staff contracts would safeguard the independence of the international civil service. There was also a fundamental matter of fairness towards these employees who performed regular and core duties but had nonetheless less favourable conditions and were subject to job insecurity. The number of non-staff could be quite high in some agencies, up to 80 per cent in some cases.

The Commissioners expressed very diverse views, some considering that the ICSC should not be addressing these matters as it was not the enforcing body; others agreed with the staff representatives in that these issues indeed fell under the purview of the Commission in setting standards of employment. The agencies reaffirmed the need for flexibility, which for staff representatives was often an excuse to adjust the staff regulations and rules in a manner that was unfavourable to staff. Discussions went in different directions, sometimes in great detail; however, since no definite position was reached, discussions are most likely to continue at the next session (83rd) of the ICSC in Geneva in July. The staff federations will therefore need to study further what has already been presented, carry out some research, seek legal guidance and, depending on how the discussions go in July, consider raising the matter with the Fifth Committee of the UN General Assembly.

Other matters

The Union of General Service Staff (UGSS) of FAO/WFP submitted a paper on two measures taken by FAO management which would have implications within the common system: (i) the global call of interest for the recruitment of GS staff, as this would open the door to the international recruitment of this category of staff, in contradiction with the established principle of local recruitment; (ii) the abolition of the language allowance for GS staff recruited on or after 1 January 2016, which is an unprecedented measure for the category. Having recognized that the wider issue of local recruitment would be considered under the review of the use of categories

and that the issue of the language allowance was already under consideration by the internal justice mechanism, the Commission invited its interlocutors to actively engage in and consult on the issues.

Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions (ACPAQ)

During the second week of its session, the ICSC reviewed the report of the Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions (ACPAQ).

The staff federations congratulated the Secretariat on its presentation and, as agreed at ACPAQ, reminded the Commission that for Geneva, any expansion to the Canton of Vaud should be restricted to the area closest to Geneva, frequented by UN staff, namely the Prefecture of Nyon. Also, tracking out-of-area expenses for the place-to-place survey should be limited to cases where certain goods could not be found locally and as such staff purchasing power was unavoidably affected by non-local price trends. For duty stations where all goods could be obtained locally, any decision by a staff member to purchase similar goods from abroad should be seen as a purely private consumer choice. As such staff purchasing power in the duty station would not be affected by non-local price trends and such purchases should not be included in out-of-area expenses. FICSA took note of the intention to continue consulting with the local survey committees during the forthcoming round of surveys.
