

FICSA CIRCULAR



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To: Chairs, Member Associations/Unions
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Presidents, Federations with Observer Status
Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Standing Committees

From: Diab El Tabari, President

**STATEMENT BY
THE FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS' ASSOCIATIONS (FICSA) AND
THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE OF INTERNATIONAL STAFF UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS
(CCISUA)
TO THE 81ST SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS COMMISSION (ICSC)**

(27 July 2015, IAEA Vienna)

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Commission, Representatives of the Organizations, Representatives of UNISERV, Members of the Secretariat, our hosts IAEA, and observers,

Today I'll be making the opening statement on behalf of both FICSA and CCISUA, mindful of the importance of decisions that the Commissioners will eventually recommend to the General Assembly in fall 2015. Mindful too of our increasing cooperation as our two federations work to ensure that the 100,000 staff we represent, including every staff member in Vienna and many more in the world's most difficult and dangerous locations, benefit from appropriate conditions of service to support them as they and their families embark on careers around the world.

And this Mr. Chairman, cuts to the heart of why we are here today.

As we speak, our organizations are confronted with huge and unprecedented challenges, from dealing with growing political instability in many countries, to addressing persistent economic inequalities, and consolidating an international rules and norms-based system. Our colleagues in WHO, WFP and the UN have coordinated an ultimately successful response to the scourge of Ebola. Meanwhile staff here at the International Atomic Energy Agency will need to monitor the implementation of a technically complex agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran, the United States and other partners – the eyes of the world will be on them.

Mr. Chairman, in a few months, the General Assembly will agree on the seventeen sustainable development goals, which will set the agenda for the work of the organizations here for the next fifteen years.

Addressing these huge changes requires first-class minds. The organizations must continue to recruit the brightest and the best, as they gradually replace a cohort of staff now going into retirement – a cohort that led the UN to success with the Millennium Development Goals, and who were the cream of their generation.

And this brings us to the big issue this week: the compensation review.

FICSA and CCISUA are very concerned about what is envisaged in the final package. Our view, from eight working group meetings, three ICSC sessions and several consultations with staff and other stakeholders is that what we have on the table will not attract the staff our organizations require to meet the challenges we have mentioned, and in so doing harm the very sustainability and relevance of the organizations in the room today.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to bring to your attention two things.

The first is that the IAEA our host organization, has reported difficulties in attracting and retaining talent, even with the current conditions of service. And given what is at stake for them and for the world, as mentioned earlier, a lot depends on this.

Secondly, as you may be aware, the Government of Germany last month flew senior UN staff of German nationality to Berlin in order to discuss issues of mutual interest. Among the concerns raised by senior managers at the UN was the increasing difficulty of attracting the best and the brightest Germans, and their concerns took on board developments on the compensation review. Mr. Chairman, Germany does not have the best paying civil service – that honour belongs to the United States. But if the UN can no longer attract the best Germans, and possibly those from other countries, then it will be that much poorer for it, because the UN, in line with the Noblemaire principle, needs to attract the best, from wherever they are.

It feels, Mr. Chairman, that we are now reaching a tipping point where, from what managers report to us, they are struggling to attract those they really need, especially to headquarters positions, which as you know are often in expensive cities, and where certain benefits are now being targeted for cuts.

Mr. Chairman, cutting costs for the sake of it may resonate well with certain national parliaments, but it won't bring us closer to getting the staff we need from every country to achieve the sustainable development goals.

On the same basis, we are also concerned for existing staff, who have committed themselves and their families to an international career, and many of whom have persuaded their spouses, often women, to quit their jobs in order to follow them. These colleagues made commitments to the UN based on current conditions of service.

Staff were also assured at the 76th session of the Commission that whatever new system was approved, it would be applied to new staff and the acquired rights of staff who had entered the

system earlier would be respected. We were told that staff who entered the UN before the new system was promulgated would have the option of joining the new system if they wish.

We therefore need to ensure that transitional arrangements are adequate and that staff do not suffer financially for it. FICSA and CCISUA have obtained independent legal advice on what we can expect in terms of acquired rights and we will be sharing this with you in due course. But we are concerned that the impact of the accumulated changes, as they are presented here, may modify conditions of service to such an extent as to provoke legal challenges from our staff.

Furthermore, several questions remain unanswered: losses for genuine single parents remain a major concern, the slowing of step periodicity fails to be supported by valid reasons and has indeed been justified to us as a crude cost cutting measure, the reduced relocation allowances will discourage mobility, the proposed education grant with a number of reductions and restrictions is unrealistic, affects staff choices, does not address complexity, and greatly diminishes the value of a critical staff benefit.

At the same time, we hope that the Commission will reverse the cut it made last March to the additional hardship allowance. Staff sent to non-family duty stations must be able to cover the costs for the household they leave behind, or else the best staff will refuse to go.

FICSA and CCISUA take this opportunity to remind the Commission, once again, of our belief in its importance as an independent expert and technical body, free from the influence and vagaries of national interests.

Likewise, we trust that decisions made at the Commission with the consent of the organizations are respected by those organizations.

We will speak further on the mandatory age of separation when that item comes up. However, it has been disheartening to see how the implementation date for what would be a relatively minor change to the staff rules have moved further and further into the future. The date of implementation for 65, 1 January 2016, was agreed in 2013 and was known well before biennium budgets for 2016-17 were prepared. Organizations cannot keep pushing back the inevitable. They need to face reality.

As mentioned at the start of this statement, the conclusions reached at the end of this session, will have a profound effect on the UN common system, the staff it can recruit and the impact member organizations can have. In light of this, we call on the Commission to look beyond short-term cost-cutting considerations. The UN that it will help shape, will be the one operating for at least the next two decades. When Member States in the future assess our organizations' performance, they will hopefully be able to point to the positive contribution the ICSC had in helping the UN bring in the top talent that could make a change.

Mr. Chairman, on this basis, let our dialogue begin.

Thank you.
