

FICSA CIRCULAR



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To: Chairs, Member Associations/Unions
Members of the Executive Committee
Chairs, Members with Associate Status
Chairs, Associations with Consultative Status
Presidents, Federations with Observer Status
Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Standing Committees

From: Gemma Vestal, General Secretary

**STATEMENT BY
THE FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS' ASSOCIATIONS (FICSA)
IN THE UN SECRETARY-GENERAL'S TOWN HALL MEETING HELD AT UNOG ON 18
JANUARY 2017**

Delivered by the Information Officer of FICSA, Mr. Brett Fitzgerald

Sir,

My name is Brett Fitzgerald, and I will be speaking on behalf of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations, better known as FICSA. I would like to extend our congratulations on your election to this esteemed position of Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Not only does the United Nations have a unique and independent role to play on the global scene, but it also has a primary role as the lead organization in the UN common system, not only here in Geneva but elsewhere as well. We used to say that what happens today at the UN in terms of changes in employment and working conditions will eventually, some years later, become equally applicable at the specialized Agencies of the common system. Today, however, we are finding that the speed at which those changes find their way into the specialized Agencies is much faster, even simultaneously entering into effect in numerous organizations in many cases. We believe this reflects a growing recognition that the agencies and organizations of the UN common system can no longer work in isolation of one another, as contributing Member States common to all the organizations and agencies continue to question the value of services provided against the costs related thereto. We fully concur that if the UN and the specialized Agencies are to remain relevant, reform is necessary, and we would like to play our role in contributing towards such reforms.

It is widely accepted that whenever a company or, in this case, an organization becomes large, bureaucracy all too often begins to take precedence over good governance and efficient administration. The United Nations and the specialized Agencies are certainly no exception. To quote from a recent article in the Harvard Business Review, “bureaucracy is a cancer that eats away at organizational resilience”. Therefore, as the Secretary-General and his administration look at directing organizational resources towards objective goals, our Federation hopes that less importance will be given to bureaucracy when exploring possible avenues for rendering the organization more efficient in meeting its goals.

A perfect example, Sir, of something in the UN common system which needs to be fixed is the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund. Overseeing the Pension Fund is a Pension Board which in turn is advised by the Fund’s secretariat, your RSG in charge of investments, an Investments Committee, a Committee of Actuaries, a Board of Auditors, an Audit Committee, an Assets and Liabilities Monitoring Committee and a Standing Committee. And yet, despite all of these heavy oversight mechanisms, the most basic responsibility of the Fund’s secretariat to pay benefits to new retirees in a timely manner was neglected for months. Phone calls were not being answered, emails were not being replied to, and many new retirees went months, some more than one year, without being paid. Had this been a government pension scheme at the national level, citizens would have been in the street protesting. To date, no one has been held accountable, because in the UN common system accountability at the higher levels is sadly missing. We believe that there is much room to reduce the bureaucracy in the Fund so that it can once again begin focusing on its primary duties and responsibilities in a more efficient, effective and transparent manner.

Weak whistle-blower policies in some of the common system organizations, or lack of enforcement of existing policies, is leading to increasing acts of retaliation against whistle-blowers. As pointed out by the Joint Inspection Unit in one of its reports, it is for the most part the staff who dare to blow the whistle on real or perceived wrongdoing and, therefore, it is of real concern that those colleagues who are courageous enough to blow the whistle are later the victims of retaliation. Whilst we understand that the best whistle-blower policy can only be effective as those who are enforcing it, we nevertheless realize that we must begin somewhere by developing and implementing such robust policies.

Lastly, Secretary-General, I have the duty to mention that staff-management relations in several of the specialized Agencies are in a terrible state. Without going into detail I only need to recall that the Joint Inspection Unit, in its 2012 report on staff-management relations wrote that “the attitude of the Executive Head serves a critical factor in the success or failure of staff-management relations in an organization, irrespective of the administration, budgetary and political constraints.” I believe I needn’t say more when we ask ourselves why staff-management relations in a few of the specialized Agencies are in such a poor state.

In this respect we recognize and appreciate the fact that the Secretary-General has, so quickly upon taking up office, arranged to hold these town hall meetings with staff in both New York and Geneva. We believe this to be an indication of the importance which the Secretary-General places on staff and their role in contributing to the Organization’s efficient achievement of its objectives.

We recognize the enormous challenges and responsibilities which you will be facing as Secretary-General of this important Organization. Our Federation and the staff we represent look forward to working together with you and your team in facing those challenges. We shall do our utmost

to help ensure that the UN as well as the specialized Agencies remain relevant in the interest of the world's population we serve.

We thank you, Sir, and wish you the very best.

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