

# 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: Brett Fitzgerald, General Secretary

**STATEMENT BY  
THE FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS' ASSOCIATIONS (FICSA)  
TO THE FIFTH COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
AT ITS 69<sup>TH</sup> SESSION**

**AGENDA ITEM 139: UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM  
(New York, 27 October 2014)**

*Delivered by the President of FICSA, Mr. Diab El Tabari*

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA), which represents thousands of staff from diversified organizations, composed mainly of UN common system specialized agencies, institutes, treaties and conventions, as well as of intergovernmental organizations and international financial institutions, many of which apply the United Nations common system of salaries, allowances and other conditions of service, I have the honour to address you today on several critical challenges which our staff are facing, including the delivery of the organizations' mandates in line with the UN Charter.

The continued use of non-staff contracts remains a major concern in addressing the various challenges and for the continuity of the common system; a matter that I will address later in this statement.

Distinguished Members of the Fifth Committee,

## **Review of the compensation package**

Since December 2013, in follow up to UN Resolution 67/257, the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), as the principal body entrusted with the vital responsibility of keeping

together the complex canvas of the common system, launched a series of working groups to look into ways of improving the compensation package for staff using the limited financial resources which decrease every year whilst needs continue to grow; at the same time staff are requested to maintain the level of services at the desired standard.

FICSA and the sister Staff Federations have actively participated in all the ICSC working group sessions and in the two ICSC regular sessions during 2014. The impression that the Federation has been given is that the Commission is simply looking at a cost-cutting exercise.

FICSA values the role of the Commission and insists that it remains an independent body, free of all political pressure.

A competitive compensation package would attract a work force of the highest possible caliber. However, in a competitive world led by the private sector the UN now faces growing difficulty to attract and to retain staff of this caliber as well as maintaining the desired diversity in representing all nations.

It is true that with a less attractive remuneration package, the UN would still be able to maintain a work force, but the chances are that it would be harder to deliver the mandates of the UN Charter. A competitive remuneration package which allows the UN to recruit worldwide would contribute to the UN's required independence from local political pressure in the field operations. If we lose that edge the consequences could be far worse than expected and we do not want to see that. Risking the quality of service should not be an option.

FICSA remains fully active and will continue participating in the work of the ICSC. We request the Fifth Committee today to support the original objectives leading to this review in line with the staff views that we stated above.

### **Survey of best prevailing conditions of employment in Madrid**

FICSA wishes to put on record its disagreement with the interpretation by the ICSC at its 78<sup>th</sup> session in New York with regards to UNGA Resolution 68/253, which unduly penalizes the General Service staff worldwide.

It is clear that UNGA Resolution 67/257 requested a review of the compensation package for Professional staff. It is also clear that UNGA Resolution 68/253, which requested that no increase in allowances be permitted until the full compensation package was submitted to the General Assembly in 2015, referred solely to staff in the Professional category.

FICSA therefore maintains that UNGA Resolution 68/253 was referring exclusively to the Professional category. In relating it to the original UN Resolution 67/257 guiding the compensation package, the Commission has wrongly imposed a freeze on allowances of staff in the General Service category. The salary survey methodology for GS staff has already been revised pursuant to UNGA Resolution 63/251 and 63/231 and has been put into effect since 2011. Implementing a freeze on allowances for the General Service staff when no changes will be proposed for the 2015 General Assembly session simply does not make sense. Should this happen the General Service staff would endure a freeze for no reason, which would have, above all, a major impact on staff in the field who often struggle with their current take-home pay.

FICSA therefore kindly requests that the Fifth Committee supports an immediate lift of the freeze on the allowances for the General Service staff with retroactive effect from March 2014.

### **Mandatory age of separation**

FICSA is fully in favour of going ahead with last year's ICSC recommendation to implement 65 as the mandatory age of separation for existing staff as of 2016 with no further delay.

In FICSA's view, the organizations did not come up with any solid argument to postpone its implementation to 2018.

UN common system organizations use 60 as the age of separation for staff recruited before 1990, age 62 for staff recruited after 1990, and age 65 for staff recruited after 1 January 2014. A unified age of separation at 65 effective 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 needs to be adopted, while respecting staff's right to retire at 60 (if recruited before 1990) and 62 (if recruited after 1990).

Organizations would have ample time and flexibility (the 2014 and 2015 retirements) to carry out reforms and adjust structures as they require.

### **United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF)**

While FICSA appreciates the creation of a full-time position to manage the investments of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund, it was disappointed that the Pension Board was not consulted with regard to the filling of this position even though it is financed by the Pension Fund.

### **Non-staff**

As mentioned earlier, the increased use of non-staff contracts to address core services has become an unsatisfactory norm.

In 2012 FICSA alerted the Fifth Committee to the fragmentation of contracts in the UN common system (figures sourced from CEB documentation). In a system that employs about 190,000 staff members, some 86,000, that is 45 per cent of the total workforce, belong to the so-called non-staff category.

*“ (...) The denomination given by organizations to the different types of non-staff contracts are: Special Service Agreements, Individual Contractor Agreement, Service Contract, Government Secondes, Supernumerary Contracts, Individual Contractor Contract, External Collaboration Contract, United Nations Volunteer, Individual Consultant, Individual Specialist, Contractual Service Agreement, Consultant, Casual Labor, Visiting Expert, PSA Subscriber, National Project Personnel, National Correspondent, South/South Subscriber, TCDC/TCCT Expert, Editors, Proofreaders, Teachers, Contractual Service Agreement, Agency Field, Ministry Staff, National Staff, Gratis Personnel<sup>1</sup>”.*

Non-staff are considered less costly than staff on regular contracts; consequently their popularity has increased dramatically in most organizations, resulting sometimes in non-staff contracts amounting to as much as 70 per cent of the total number of the employed workforce.

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<sup>1</sup> CEB/2011/HLCM/HR/21 of 12 August 2012.

However, if the burden on the budget is alleviated by the use of non-staff contracts, the devastating effects on the organizational climate are measurable. Young recruits - i.e. those who normally are offered these contracts - very soon realize that they are discriminated against, instead of being offered a roadmap for integration into a less precarious contractual situation.

The High-Level Committee on Management, in its 24<sup>th</sup> session in Washington, recalled that the growing need for action and services of the United Nations require a *cadre* of stable international civil servants.

As the global needs for peace, development, food security, health and assistance to the weakest populations of the world continue to rise, demands on UN staff have also become more pressing; however, the recurrent request to the organizations is to: “do more with less”.

As in the review of the compensation package, the continuous search for the lowest possible price tag continues to drive the system to a very dangerous breaking point, where the essence of the international civil service would be lost.

Today more than ever, the world needs an efficient and independent United Nations, nothing more and nothing less than the Secretariat describes in Articles 100 and 101 of the UN Charter.

In the same context, FICSA remains concerned regarding the use of private security services and the outsourcing of numerous activities in an apparent effort to achieve financial savings. The Federation firmly believes that short-term savings should not take priority over professional and well-trained security staff.

FICSA believes that the use of non-staff contracts, private security services and outsourcing should be kept to a minimum if not abolished.

### **Staff/management relations (the summary dismissal of the President of the WIPO Staff Association)**

Another major issue of concern is the blatant attack on the freedom of speech and freedom of association by the Chair of the HLCM himself, who in his capacity as Director General of WIPO, summarily dismissed the President of the WIPO Staff Association, basing his action on unfounded grounds and without having any prima face evidence. The Director General of WIPO continues to weakly but repeatedly claim that the action taken against the President of the WIPO Staff Association was against him as a staff member and not as a staff representative, an argument that rings especially hollow when considering that he was on 100% release from duty to serve as the Staff Association President on a full-time basis. A communication on this matter has been sent to the WIPO Governing Bodies and to the UN Secretary-General by the three Staff Federations. Further staff actions will follow.

The three Staff Federations also met with the WIPO Director General at the recent meeting of the HLCM where he agreed that his action was disproportionate with the alleged offense and that he would reconsider the decision.

The Federation requests the full support of the Fifth Committee on further mechanisms to ensure prevention of and quick remedies to cases of abuse of power exercised by officials of the United

Nations family, and we respectfully request the Fifth Committee to exert all efforts for the speedy reinstatement of Mr. Moncef Kateb, President of the WIPO Staff Association.

### **Ebola outbreak**

FICSA has been following with concern the development of the outbreak of the Ebola virus in West Africa and has stressed the importance of occupational health and safety measures for staff. We are pleased that prevention information and supplies have been made available in United Nations offices. Particularly important among the measures implemented to date is the provision of pickup and drop off services of national staff in order to reduce the use of crowded public transportation where they may risk exposure to the virus.

The ongoing and exponential increase in the transmission of the Ebola virus is deeply worrying, as are the related social and economic implications in the affected countries – widespread fear, collapse of health infrastructure and skyrocketing prices. These have been described in greater detail in the letter to you from the Staff Associations in Sierra Leone, dated 17 September 2014.

FICSA is proud that the United Nations is at the forefront of the response to this global public health emergency. We hope that the new mission, UNMEER, will be successful. However, we do warn against potential duplication of services and crosscutting of lines of authority between the various organizations working in this regard.

FICSA also notes with concern, the cuts in the organizations' budgets in recent years and the corresponding reduction in staffing levels and emergency response capacity.

The ability to mobilize the necessary expertise in the present crisis situation depends on the United Nations' ability to deliver an appropriate standard of care for all its personnel. It also demands adequate training and preparation of newly deployed or redeployed international staff for the specificities of the context. The Staff Associations in Sierra Leone have come to you with a number of concerns and requests for your consideration.

We are particularly worried by the reports that United Nations staff in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone have lost access to normal destinations for emergency medical evacuation, including Kenya, Senegal and South Africa, which reportedly are no longer allowing the entry of residents from Ebola-affected countries. We are keen to be kept informed of your views on these matters and the subsequent actions that are foreseen, including protections and support for locally recruited colleagues.

We highly appreciate the ongoing personal attention and commitment of the UN Secretary-General in these matters which affect staff on the front lines and for hearing their concerns. We reaffirm our commitment to the efforts of the United Nations to support countries and all those affected by this unprecedented public health emergency.

### **Concluding remarks**

Finally, allow me to express the Federation's continued concern regarding the status of staff/management relations in many organizations of the common system. We had hoped for improvement following publication of the JIU Report on staff/management relations, and we

continue to look forward to informal discussions with the distinguished delegates on the issue and interpretation of collective bargaining within the framework of the UN system.

FICSA wishes to reiterate its interest to meet the distinguished delegates and expand on any of the issues which have been raised in this statement, as well as discuss any other issue on which you may wish clarification.

We wish you a successful completion of this session.

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