

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

**JOINT WRITTEN STATEMENT BY
THE FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS' ASSOCIATIONS (FICSA),
THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE OF INTERNATIONAL STAFF UNIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS (CCISUA) AND
THE UNITED NATIONS INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS' FEDERATION (UNISERV)
TO THE 64th SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS JOINT STAFF PENSION BOARD (UNJSPB)**

Delivered on Friday, 28 July 2017

Madam Chair, Distinguished members of the Board, Observers, Pension Fund staff, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our three staff Federations thank you for this opportunity to convey to you some of the views and concerns of our constituents: the staff members of the United Nations common system. An exchange such as this enables the Board to hear first-hand how staff view things: views, we trust, that will be taken into consideration.

First, we wish to congratulate you, Madam, on your election to chair this session of the Board. Secondly, we wish to place on record our deepest appreciation and genuine gratitude to the Pension Fund staff. We respect their efforts and commitment throughout the period under review.

Of the many issues before us, we wish to align ourselves with those Board members for whom resolving the problems surrounding the late payment of benefits and withdrawal settlements to new retirees is a matter of pre-eminent importance. Although the backlog may have decreased, things are still not running at the normal level of operations.

The staff federations firmly believe that the Board needs to reconsider ways and means of rectifying promptly this unacceptable hardship on new retirees. We should build on the firm steps that the Board took towards restoring the Fund's credibility at its previous session. If the Board succeeds in bringing about the swift processing of the backlog in initial pension payments to new retirees, it will have complied with the instruction in General Assembly Resolution 70/248 - and I quote - "to take appropriate steps to ensure the FundA addresses the causes of such delays", a plea that was repeated in Resolution 71/265 on the United Nations pension system.

We share that sense of urgency. We would like to see a more proactive Fund, and have it introduce the concept of provisional payments, as practised by many governments and certain international organizations. In such instances, the first pension is paid out as a provisional payment shortly before the staff member retires, thus helping the retiree to bear significant costs in the first month of retirement.

Resolution 71/265 also expressed serious concern over the investments of the Fund: a concern that we also share. The improvement in investment performance in the first six months of the current year compared to that of the past three years has hardly allayed our fears.

Talking of performance, the staff federations see a direct correlation between the performance of the Fund's senior management and the state of the staff-management relations in the secretariat. It is important to recall that, at the previous session of the Board, the staff federations spoke of their serious concern in that regard. They stressed the need for enhanced transparency, improved communications and consultations - not only with the Fund's staff, but also with the Staff Pension Committees and participants at large.

On numerous occasions, the Fund's staff representatives have expressed disagreement with the Fund's lack of respect for the United Nations Staff Regulations and Rules. As stated in Article 7 of the Fund's Regulations and Rules, the Fund's staff members are appointed by the UN Secretary General. They thus hold UN Secretariat contracts governed by the Staff Regulations and Rules of the United Nations.

The very failure to consult staff on matters relating to the structural reorganization of their units, compounded by a failure to consult with the staff representative body, has contributed to extremely low staff morale. Last year, there has not been a single meeting between management and staff representatives despite requests by the latter.

Taking all the foregoing and ongoing difficulties into account, we trust the Board will exercise its oversight function accordingly. We noted with concern the proposal that the mandate of the Secretary/CEO of the Fund be extended for a second five-year term, and acknowledge yesterday's decision of the Board to limit the second term to three years. We trust that the Board will establish a search committee that should, inter alia, take our concerns into consideration. It is expected that the Fund's secretariat will prepare and submit to the next session of the Board all required documents so that a proper selection process can be initiated.

We have also followed with dismay recent events surrounding colleagues from the United Nations and UNESCO who, although elected to their respective Staff Pension Committees, have been denied their requests to attend the 64th Pension Board session and thus have not been permitted to represent their constituents. This is an extremely worrying and regrettable development that we intend to address in other fora.

We also note with a growing sense of disquiet the refusal of credentials for colleagues who were to attend as observers on behalf of CCISUA and UNISERV - on the most tenuous of grounds: conflict of interest. To our mind, an issue such as that should be raised with the UN General Assembly. In our view, it constitutes a clear violation of the basic rights of freedom of association and freedom of speech.

Madam Chair, Distinguished members of the Board and Observers,

Today our Pension Fund is going through a difficult period. However, we should not forget that the United Nations system has risen to many challenges in the past and mastered greater difficulties. We have full trust in the United Nations system, in the collective wisdom of the Board and in that of the UN General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies. We are convinced that this wisdom will prevail once again and dispel the current crisis. Ultimately, it will restore the sound operation of the Fund, together with its credibility and reputation.

Both current and future beneficiaries await the outcome of this session of the Board with heightened expectations and greater hopes. On their behalf, the staff federations also trust that your actions will address and resolve their urgent concerns.

Thank you for your attention.
