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JIU Report on Inter-Agency Staff Mobility
and Work/Life Balance in the United Nations System

STATEMENT by Mr M. Mounir ZAHRAN
Chair of the JOINT INSPECTION UNIT
Before
the Fifth Committee, 66th Session of the General Assembly
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Mr. Chairman, distinguished delegates,

I have the honour to introduce today the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on *Inter-Agency Staff Mobility and Work/Life balance in the Organizations of the United Nations System*, contained in document A/66/355, on behalf of the authors Inspectors Enrique Roman-Morey and Even Fontaine Ortiz.

The objective of the report is to assess the policies and mechanisms regulating staff mobility and work/life balance from a system-wide perspective, providing participating organizations and their respective governing organs with an independent, external assessment of relevant issues. The report contains ten recommendations (which appear in the annex to this statement) and a set of proposals addressed to the Governing Bodies, the CEB and Executives Heads, with a view to harmonizing and enhancing staff mobility and work/life balance across the United Nations system.

Mr. Chairman,

It is generally accepted that a structured mobility scheme may enhance staff capabilities, providing staff with a broader experience. However, United Nations system organizations should go beyond this widely accepted mantra; mobility should not be an end in itself. Staff mobility is key to achieving organizational goals; it is fundamental to deliver where the services of organizations are required and to react to emergencies or global challenges. Additionally, enhanced system-wide mobility would translate into a better understanding by staff of the complexities and peculiarities of various UN system organizations thus contributing towards “Delivering as One”.

However, the United Nations system is formed by very diverse international organizations. The mandates, size, operational needs and activities undertaken by them vary; there are highly mobile entities coexisting with others where staff mobility is not a major concern. This lead the authors of

the report to conclude that there is no “one mobility scheme fits all organizations”. We take note with appreciation of the comments of the Secretary-General and the CEB on the report (A/66/355/Add.1) who welcome the recognition that a “one-size-fits-all” approach is not applicable to staff mobility, stating that the report recommendations raise interesting principles and ideas regarding inter-agency mobility.

Mr. Chairman,

Staff mobility should help to better meet organizational needs while appropriately taking into account staff needs. Only a proper matching of organizational and staff needs can guarantee a solid base for the successful development and implementation of staff mobility and work/life balance initiatives. Data provided by organizations show that inter-agency mobility is insignificant in terms of the number of staff who have moved between different organizations. However, inter-agency mobility can and should be promoted focusing on commonalities and values shared by all the international organizations belonging to the United Nations common system.

The financial implications of mobility also need to be taken fully into consideration when launching new staff mobility initiatives. In addition to easily recognizable direct costs associated with staff mobility, such as travel, household removal, etc., there are other hidden costs that are difficult to quantify but certainly not negligible, such as the time taken for staff to learn and adapt to new undertakings or to comply with administrative procedures related to relocation.

It should be noted that inter-agency mobility currently happens spontaneously based on staff initiatives. It is not the consequence of a planned strategy, nor of proactive actions taken by organizations. In this context, new inter-agency mobility initiatives could and should be built. The report includes some proposals and ideas gathered during the interviews undertaken by the Inspectors in their field missions. It is hoped that these ideas could serve as a “food for thought” in the relevant discussions undertaken by organizations in the context of the CEB.

Mr. Chairman,

The authors of the report identified a major issue that needs to be urgently addressed. In 2005, the CEB issued the Inter-Agency Mobility Accord. This Accord was intended to replace the former Inter-organization Agreement, concerning transfer, secondment or loan of staff among the organizations applying the United Nations common system of salaries and allowances. However, after more than six years since the Accord was launched, organizations have not yet reached a consensus on its use. Some organizations use it, while others have not yet accepted it and continue to use the former Agreement. This confusing situation does not facilitate system-wide mobility and the report calls for an urgent solution to this issue.

The harmonization of business practices is a must to facilitate inter-agency mobility. The JIU is pleased to note that organizations are well aware of this important issue, and supports their current efforts to further harmonize business practices. Furthermore, the authors of the report encourage the

advancement towards a common set of staff regulations and rules for the whole United Nations common system with enhanced mobility as an important component.

Last but not least, and a point with which the agencies also agree as per the Secretary-General's note, is the need for more active participation by the United Nations' medical services in the development and implementation of relevant human resources management policies regarding staff mobility. Medical services can not only help human resources management to make better and more informed decisions regarding staff mobility, but also have a major role to play in supporting work/life balance programs. The Inspectors adhere to the views of the Medical Directors Working Group, which expressed growing concern regarding the current capacity of the United Nations system to protect, manage, and monitor the health of its staff. This is of particular relevance to those staff deployed at hardship duty stations, and in the context of the United Nations' strategic movement towards mobility and increased field presence.

Mr. Chairman,

The Secretary-General's note highlights the agreement by the agencies that dual career support is a key consideration in their ability to attract and retain qualified staff, of which facilitating local work permits is only one element; the agencies also call for encouragement, support and central monitoring with regards to the need to strengthen local networking among international organizations and spouses. Of the report's ten recommendations, Recommendation 9 is addressed to the legislative bodies of the United Nations system organization and reads as follows "The legislative bodies of the organizations of the United Nations common system should bring to the attention of the host countries' authorities the need to facilitate the access to local labour markets for the spouses of staff members of international organizations, through, inter alia, the granting of work permits or similar arrangements." The difficulty of accompanying expatriate spouses being able to continue their professional careers is one of the most important hurdles to overcome in order to recruit highly qualified staff, as well as to promote staff mobility. Previous JIU reports have also advised on the need to find a solution to this crucial concern and called on organizations to continue their coordinated efforts and introduce this matter in negotiations of any new host country agreement, as was done in the agreement that established the WTO in Geneva in 1994.

Mr. Chairman,

I will be pleased to receive your comments and to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

Annex I

Recommendations for consideration by legislative organs and/or executive heads

Recommendation 1

The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), through its High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), should agree urgently on the contents and uniform use across the United Nations system of one legal instrument to regulate staff mobility among organizations of the United Nations common system. It should also define, inter alia, the respective responsibilities of organizations with regard to the allocation of financial liabilities related to the different types of staff movements.

Recommendation 2

The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), through its High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), should develop system-wide standards for the systematic collection, monitoring and consistent reporting of staff mobility relevant data, including inter-agency mobility and mobility internal to the respective organizations.

Recommendation 3

The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), through its High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), should elaborate a plan of action, including specific deadlines and responsibilities, for the development of one set of common staff regulations and rules applicable to the whole United Nations common system.

Recommendation 4

The executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations common system should review their internal staff mobility and/or staff rotation schemes from a system-wide perspective, in order to make them supportive, consistent and coherent with inter-agency mobility initiatives.

Recommendation 5

In the context of the CEB, the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations common system should review their internal relevant rules, with a view to granting that all vacant posts within their respective organizations are open to all United Nations staff members, including those working in other system organizations on an equal basis as those established for their own staff.

Recommendation 6

The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), through its High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM), should elaborate an inter-agency common system policy, including its legal framework, for new contracts and the subsequent induction of new staff joining any organization of the common system with a view to developing a common system culture.

Recommendation 7

The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) should consider introducing new staff rotational/mobility schemes at a system-wide level and with a view to facilitating the voluntary participation of staff in humanitarian and/or peacekeeping activities.

Recommendation 8

The Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) should consider introducing new inter-agency staff mobility initiatives at a system-wide level based on the concept of common and specific occupational networks.

Recommendation 9

The legislative bodies of the organizations of the United Nations common system should bring to the attention of the host countries' authorities the need to facilitate the access to local labour markets for the spouses of staff members of international organizations, through, inter alia, the granting of work permits or similar arrangements.

Recommendation 10

The executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations common system should systematically assess the performance of work/life balance programmes periodically and include, inter alia, a cost-benefit analysis of such programmes as part of their regular performance reporting.