



66TH session of the United Nations General Assembly

**STATEMENT BY
THE FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS' ASSOCIATIONS (FICSA)
TO THE FIFTH COMMITTEE**

Agenda item 141: United Nations Common System

New York, 24 October 2011

(Delivered by Mr. Mauro Pace, President)

Mr. Chair,
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,

As the representative of some 50,000 staff working in the United Nations common system, it is often a challenge to bring our concerns to you during a climate of economic austerity and crisis. Our mandate is to defend staff rights and ensure that equitable conditions of service for all common system staff are maintained at a level that will enable the recruitment and retention of the best qualified people. While this does not necessarily imply that we always want 'more', it does mean that we must express our objection to being asked repeatedly to 'do more with less'. Cost savings have already been made over a number of years: the vast majority of UN common system organizations have already made efforts to re-organize their ways of doing business through downsizing, de-layering, off-shoring, and outsourcing for more than a decade.

However, this has happened against the backdrop of an increasing pressure on all of us. The challenges faced by our organizations continue to grow in number and complexity. An increasing number of countries are confronting civil unrest and hunger. Vulnerable populations clamor for our assistance. It is our job to serve them to the best of our ability and it is your responsibility to ensure that we have the resources to do so. Those resources include first and foremost human resources, the staff who are the organizations' primary resource.

It is not that we are unsympathetic to the difficulties created by the economic crisis, nor do we suppose that the major donor countries truly want to make savings at the expense of the UN system. If anything, it is in these difficult times that the need for multilateral cooperation becomes more acute; organizations need the financial means to meet the growing needs of the international community.

Thus, may we caution you not to take decisions on conditions of employment that have long-term and far-reaching negative implications. The crisis is no doubt serious, but it should not be used over and over again to justify measures that will permanently diminish the essence and effectiveness of the international civil service. The growth of our salaries and allowances has already been severely contained over the past decade by a series of decisions worked out by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). And because our salaries are already linked to the salaries in the Member States, national austerity measures are already affecting us. The salaries of Professional staff are effectively frozen because of the two-year freeze currently imposed on the comparator civil service, while the salaries of General Service staff are directly affected by local economic realities.

It has come to our attention that some Member States called on the ICSC to revoke the cost-of-living adjustment recently granted in New York - the first such increase since August 2008. In this regard, we trust that the independence recognized in the Statutes of the ICSC will be respected and the legitimacy of the increase will not be questioned. To do so would without doubt lead to immediate litigation.

Please give careful consideration to our concerns as you consider the decisions and recommendations of the ICSC and make every effort to ensure that your decisions will not weaken the ability of the organizations to carry out their mandate.

Mr. Chairman,

Turning to the Report of the International Civil Service Commission for 2011, FICSA would like to remind you of its positions on several important items.

Last year, in the name of harmonization, allowances for staff in the specialized agencies, funds and programmes serving in non family duty stations were revised and reduced, much to the disappointment of staff who have faced the test of working in high-risk postings away from their family and home. FICSA has already expressed its regret with the decisions taken by the General Assembly on this issue because of its concern about the ability of the specialized agencies and the funds and programmes to operate effectively.

Last year, in its intervention in this Committee, FICSA raised the concern that the implementation of the new scheme could lead to legal challenges. The new allowance went into effect on 1 July 2011, and the UN Dispute Tribunal has already received an appeal against it. The complainant rightly argued that the decision to implement the new allowance represented drastic changes in the terms and

conditions of employment, entailed important losses for the staff members and, moreover, would have retroactive effects. This is only the tip of the iceberg.

This year, in the name of 'pragmatism', the methodologies used to adjust salaries or allowances, including those for mobility and hardship, have been modified or applied in an extremely conservative fashion. FICSA would like to call for clear, coherent and consistently applied methodologies when developing and implementing adjustments to entitlements.

Additional reductions to rest and recuperation provisions have been submitted for your attention. In the deliberations on this issue, FICSA stressed that the issue under consideration was not simply a matter of adjusting an entitlement, but that the result of ending the special operations approach (SOA) had left staff in difficult field duty stations in limbo. The rest and recuperation policy must consider the option of sending staff back to their permanent place of residence, as is done in most national systems, or that of sending them to another location and paying the daily subsistence allowance. FICSA would urge you, at this session, not to accept the recommendation that rest and recuperation be amended from five consecutive working days to five consecutive calendar days, plus approved travel time. What the UN system is risking here is a lack of qualified experienced staff to carry out the mandate of the UN in these difficult duty stations.

Regarding danger pay, FICSA considers that there should be equity between international and locally recruited staff and asks that the anticipated savings from applying the new scheme be used to increase the level of the danger pay and for improvements in the scheme applied to the locally recruited staff. We seize this opportunity to remind you of our long-standing request for the recognition of hazard (now danger) pay for UNRWA area staff. We also would like to reiterate our disappointment at the considerable reduction in the number of duty stations eligible for danger pay owing to the new criteria, which we consider far too restrictive.

Concerning the revised framework for human resources management, FICSA would like to recall the global staff survey that was conducted by the secretariat of the Commission in 2008/2009, which indicated that staff members who were seeking to leave the United Nations cited lack of opportunities for growth and development as one of the factors that had influenced their decision. Not much has changed, or, if so, only for the worse. FICSA maintains that administrations should work closely with staff and managers to develop acceptable reward systems. FICSA supports the present system of annual pensionable increments and believes that rewards should be additional, fully funded and stable and should focus on teamwork. Decisions concerning the recipients of rewards should be made by a committee including staff representatives. FICSA membership sees little value to specific suggestions of non-monetary rewards and disagrees with the argument in the proposed framework that staff members are responsible for their own academic and professional development as well as the suggestion that organizations could use training or development

opportunities as part of their reward scheme. The organizations also have a responsibility for continued investment in staff's professional development.

FICSA takes note of the ICSC decision not to proceed with Phase II of the Noblemaire study, although we noted that some elements had emerged in Phase I which would have justified a more comprehensive study. FICSA suggests that the time available until the next study be used to review the methodology of the Noblemaire study, in order to align the UN conditions of employment with the most competitive realities, including those of other international organizations. The results of the last study showed clearly that the current methodology is prone to political interference and is incapable of producing an objective outcome.

Mr. Chairman,

As a last remark, FICSA would like to express its alarm at the exponential growth in the use of non-staff throughout the organizations. A consultant's report presented to the HR Network found that some 106,000 staff were working on fixed-term and continuing contracts, while some 86,000 personnel worked on non-staff contracts, an amount equivalent to 45 per cent of the total of 'regular' staff.

A number of issues arise in this context: non-staff need access to the justice system; geographical distribution becomes skewed; there is little monitoring or accountability at the field level; there are no social benefits; the employer/employee relationship is different; and the independence of the international civil service may more easily become compromised.

The responsibilities of the organizations towards non-staff need to be better defined and improved, especially in the context of emergency security situations.

Mr. Chair
Distinguished Delegates,
Colleagues,

I wish you a successful conclusion of your work.

Thank you for your attention.