

Statement by Paulina Analena, President of the United Nations Staff Union, Vienna on behalf of the staff of the United Nations Secretariat and its Funds and Programmes.

Wednesday 21 November 2012

Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentleman,

Thank you for allowing the staff of the Secretariat, Funds and Programmes to address the General Assembly and give its views on the key issues of the day: mobility, staff-management relations and justice.

Let me start with mobility.

As you will recall, you the General Assembly asked the Secretary-General to come up with a comprehensive proposal on mobility. We, the staff of the United Nations, with the exception of colleagues in New York, believe he has. We regret the position taken by our colleagues in New York.

Why do we believe he has?

The document before you today is the fruit of two years of hard graft, in-depth analysis of mobility systems in international organizations, governments and multinational organizations as well as extensive and protracted negotiations in fora ranging from bi-weekly video and tele-conferences, to face to face meetings in Geneva, Glen Cove and finally Arusha. It articulates views that both staff and management hold dear.

In the proposed mobility framework we advocated for centralized job network boards to break the silos headed by 500 D-1s and 1,500 P-5s, who in our experience tend to recruit from among those they know or those who lobby them the hardest. These boards will ensure staff are rightly recognized for their skills, competencies and experience. Managers will still have a say in the process, but it will not be absolute.

We believe the framework will increase accountability of the Secretary-General, to you the General Assembly. Management of human resources will take place at a more strategic level, not within the mini-empires I have alluded to, and the organization will be the better for it.

We also believe that staff representatives should play a role in the joint network boards. If they do in the World Bank, the World Food Programme and UNDP, why should the UN Secretariat be an exception? All evidence indicates that such representatives, while acting in an independent, collegial and professional manner, reinforce staff confidence in the system, thus reducing the risk of litigation which is a source of concern to many of you but which in reality, is minimal as demonstrated by the experience of the UNHCR with the same system of justice.

Likewise, we have yet to see a functioning mobility system with all positions open to global competition. Requiring staff to compete at every stage with the rest of the world removes any concept of career planning, which is a key part of a rotational system. Staff, who move, rightly expect a more effective route back or up.

There is also the question of fairness. Staff should not be expected to perform one or more geographical moves in the UN to get to the P-5 level, if external candidates aren't required to do the same. Skills and experience gained by a staff member from mobility should be justly valued.

In calling for this proposal to be adopted, we do so with the knowledge that there are staff members who have been stuck for years in their current positions, and not just in New York, Geneva and Vienna, but in Kabul, Baghdad and Addis Ababa.

We also believe that the value of the outcome of negotiations between the Secretary-General and his staff needs to be recognized. Failure to adopt the proposed framework will send the message to staff that the organization's chief administrative officer should not administer and that those who negotiate on his behalf have no mandate. A mobility system that does not have the elements mentioned just now simply won't have the support of the staff, and we urge you to support the proposed framework, on whose details we will work in the next two years.

And this brings us to the second point, which is staff-management relations, an issue which we will cover also on behalf of our colleagues from FICSA.

Although the matter is today being dealt with under a Secretariat-related item, it is clear to all of us that the concerns and interests addressed by the JIU report are affecting and will impact on the UN common system staff at large.

As you have seen, the report of the JIU, whose conclusions the staff we represent fully support, identifies a key problem with the current setup, namely that the Secretary-General is being deprived of a mandate to negotiate, while staff are being deprived of the rights conferred on them by provisions of the International Labour Organization. As with any national system, we pursue the right to collective bargaining, the very same right that is granted to the majority of workers, including national and other international civil servants worldwide.

In most of our countries when unions negotiate, they do so with governments. Those governments may indeed be acting under guidelines from respective parliaments, but once the negotiations are concluded, those decisions are respected; they should not go back to parliament for approval, recognizing the principle of accountability.

We believe it should be the same for us in the UN and we therefore call on you, the General Assembly, to pass a resolution conferring on staff the basic human right of collective bargaining, as set out in your own Resolution 128.

Finally, let me come to administration of justice.

When you established the current system with professional judges and courtrooms, you were bold, courageous and right. You also set up the Office of Staff Legal Assistance, which given the limited resources at its disposal relative to the army of lawyers on which Management can draw, has done a sterling job in defending staff, holding poor managers to account, and helping to ensure the rules and regulations of our organization are applied equally and fairly to all, just as you, the General Assembly, intended them to be.

Yes, Justice does have a cost. And that cost should either be borne by both sides or by neither. If Management can reach within the depths of administration to make use of all lawyers funded from the regular budget, then staff should also have access to a legal service

funded by the same budget.

However, if your preference is for staff to pay for legal representation, then let the courts award winning staff with the costs of legal representation. It will soon be clear the budget for costs of private sector lawyers far exceeds the relatively lower costs that would be borne by the organization in strengthening OSLA.

And this was just one of the commonsense reasons, as reported by the Secretary-General, for staff rejecting a staff-funded legal scheme.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Once again, allow me to express our support for the proposed framework on mobility with all its elements, for the recommendations of JIU report on staff-management relations, and for the continuation of a strong and effective OSLA that maintains its right to represent staff and promote better management practice.

I thank you for your kind attention.