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**Statement By Stephen Lieberman, Minister Counselor,
on
Agenda Item 137:
Common System
Before the Fifth Committee
Monday, November 26, 2012**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The United States looks forward to discussing the ICSC report on the common system and the associated ACABQ reports. My delegation would like to thank Mr. Kingston Rhodes, Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission and Mr. Collen Kelapile, Chairman of the ACABQ for their respective reports and Ms. Gina Casar, Assistant Secretary-General, Controller, for her statement. We would also like to thank Ms. Paulina Analena, President of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions, and Mr. Mauro Pace, President of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations, for their statements.

My delegation firmly believes in goals of the common system. For this reason, we look forward to considering all of the common system reports and to working with all delegations on the issues under this agenda item in the weeks ahead.

Though many important common system issues have been presented to the General Assembly this session, my delegation will, in the interest of time, limit our comments to a few key issues this morning.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the education grant and danger pay,

My delegation notes the application of interim or temporary measures to extend education grants and danger pay while a comprehensive review of both subjects is currently being conducted by the ICSC Secretariat. We strongly urge the ICSC Secretariat to make every effort to conclude these reviews as quickly as possible so we can have comfort that the education grant and danger pay methodologies are based on a complete analysis of staff needs and are at the same time sustainable for the Organization and Member States.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the overview of mobility policies,

My delegation plans to explore the lessons-learned from mobility schemes in other common system organizations and agrees with the ACABQ recommendation that the Secretary-General take them into consideration as the planning continues on the Secretariat's mobility plan.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, regarding the post adjustment system,

My delegation believes that this issue challenges the very sustainability of the common system. We note that the ICSC sets conditions of service for all common system organizations. Since these decisions have budgetary implications, the ICSC—and, by extension, the General Assembly—cannot make them in isolation; we can only do so fully understanding the impact of these decisions on common system organizations; anything else would put these organizations—and the foundation of the common system—in jeopardy

During the ICSC deliberations this summer, the Secretary-General made clear that the Secretariat and some funds, programs and specialized agencies were experiencing difficult financial circumstances, so the ICSC made the sensible decision to postpone the implementation of the post adjustment increase to give the General Assembly the opportunity to look into the facts and make its own determination.

My delegation strongly supports this ICSC decision, and we believe that the Fifth Committee must take this opportunity explore the financial health of common system organizations and consider whether a post adjustment increase is consistent with the needs of these organizations. We have reason to believe that the Secretariat and other common system organizations—especially those reliant on voluntary contributions—face difficult financial circumstances, and we note that some have already turned to harsh austerity measures to alleviate their budgetary pressures. The World Health Organization, for example, cut 800 HIV/AIDS workers—most of them in Africa—and consolidated the rest at a great distance from the hardest-hit areas.

Any organization that resorts to austerity measures or is considering doing so is—by definition—facing a financial crisis. Exacerbating these crises with well-meaning but ill-conceived budget decisions only risks harm to their crucial work. While we can't fix every problem every common system organization faces in the Fifth Committee, we can relieve budget pressure by continuing to postpone a post adjustment increase. In speaking with budget directors at several of these organizations, we are struck by how few of them expect us to take responsible action. We need to send them a loud and clear message: we can and we will.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation believes that it is worthwhile to look at this issue from a wider perspective. Now more than ever, Member States are facing limited resources and insist that the Organization use these resources wisely. Given that staff-related expenditures constitutes nearly 75% of the Secretariat's budget, we believe that one of the highest impact vehicles to use scarce resources

more efficiently is to control increases in staff-related expenditures. We therefore urge all delegations to consider this issue within the larger context of budget sustainability at the UN.

Mr. Chairman,

As a global institution the UN is accountable not only to Member States, but also to the citizens who fund it and whom it serves. The UN's currency is its public reputation. To allow a pay increase at a time of global financial constraint would damage the UN's credibility and reputation and reinforce some of the worst stereotypes about the UN rather than calling attention to some of its best work. We would also be compromising our duty to the UN itself by allowing another post adjustment increase when UN organizations are taking drastic austerity measures that could adversely impact important programs serving the world's most vulnerable populations. This is not just a dollars and cents issues—this is about the very credibility of the Organization and paying due regard to its components and purposes. We urge our colleagues to make a responsible decision that enhances the Organization's public credibility and invests in its future.

What we are proposing is not radical—we are not proposing pay reductions or other drastic measures. We simply propose continuing the pause in the post adjustment system to have time to study the financial health of UN common system organizations and explore possible changes to the methodology so that we can make a prudent decision that will enhance the long-term sustainability of the common system.

Mr. Chairman,

To conclude, there are a number of important common system issues to consider this fall and we look forward to working with our colleagues to make sound decisions and recommendations on the issues under this agenda item.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

