

Statement of the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

Human resources management

28 October 2016

(ACABQ report A/71/557)

Madam Chairperson,

The Advisory Committee has considered nine reports submitted by the Secretary-General on human resources management matters – namely: (a) The overview of human resources management reform: towards a global, dynamic and adaptable workforce for the United Nations (A/71/323) along with its two addenda (mobility and the assessment of the system of desirable ranges; (b) Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics (A/71/360) and the addendum dealing with non-staff; (c) Practice of the Secretary-General in disciplinary matters and possible criminal behaviour (A/71/186); (d) Amendments to the Staff Rules (A/71/258); (e) Activities of the Ethics Office (A/71/334) and (f) Seconded active-duty military and police personnel (A/71/257). The Committee's observations and recommendations are contained in its report A/71/557 which you have before you today.

Madam Chairperson,

In view of the large amount of material before you in these reports, I will not give an exhaustive account of the Committee's observations and recommendations, but rather highlight a number of issues, which in the view of the Committee are particularly important or where specific actions of the General Assembly are sought.

First, in terms of the overview report, the Committee expresses its view that the report presents a clearer assessment of the human resources management challenges facing the Organization as well as a strategic, integrated approach to address them. The Committee supports the intention of the Secretary-General to submit a detailed proposal on the evolving human resources framework at the seventy-third session of the General Assembly, indicating that this proposal should reflect a comprehensive impact assessment of all related initiatives initiated over the last decade and address long-standing challenges repeatedly discussed in the Committee's related reports.

In terms of the specific proposals contained in the overview report, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of the Secretary-General's proposal to reduce the standard posting period for position-specific job openings for the Professional and higher categories to 30 days, including for those that are part of the semi-annual staffing exercises under the new mobility framework. The Committee also recommends approval of the proposal to phase-out the legacy rosters in place before the introduction of the young professionals programme by December 2018 and the proposed extension of the time that successful candidates can remain on the roster. On the Secretary-General's proposals to increase the permissible earnings of retired former UN staff members, the Committee is of the view that the proposal will lead to an increased frequency of engaging retirees, a practice which runs contrary to efforts to improve workforce planning as well as rejuvenating the Secretariat.

As far as the proposed elimination of the examination requirement for General Service staff to the Professional category is concerned, the Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to further analyse the impact of this proposal. On a separate proposal to lift recruitment restrictions imposed by General Assembly resolution 51/226, the Committee sees merit in efforts to level the playing field between internal and external applicants for vacancies in the Secretariat. However, before recommending endorsement of the proposal, the Committee again recommends further analysis of the wider implications of lifting the existing restrictions. On the proposal to extend the duration of temporary duty assignments, the Committee is not convinced that a thorough analysis of the potential costs and benefits of the proposal has been undertaken. The Committee recommends that the necessary additional analysis be completed and if substantiated, the proposal resubmitted for the Assembly's consideration.

Madam Chairperson,

Turning now to the matter of the new staff selection and managed mobility system, the Advisory Committee notes that the findings contained in the third annual report of the Secretary-General reflect very limited experience, with low levels of placement resulting from the first managed mobility exercise in the POLNET job network and details of the vacancies filled under the new system not yet reported. Findings and lessons learned are also very preliminary in nature. Therefore, at this time, the Committee is not in a position to recommend approval of the proposal to allow vacant positions to be included in the managed mobility exercise. The Committee also stresses the importance of agreeing on a viable comparative baseline against which future mobility trends can be measured. In view of difficulties in obtaining accurate and consistent data, the Committee intends to request the Board of Auditors to verify all reported data on the numbers of geographic moves and their costs.

Concerning the system of desirable ranges, the Advisory Committee is once again of the view that the Secretary-General's proposed arithmetic adjustments to the determination of the lower and upper limits of the desirable ranges do not adequately respond to the General Assembly's request for a comprehensive review of the system.

On the matter of disciplinary matters, related investigations and the long-awaited issuance of a revised administrative instruction relating to these processes, the Committee notes that the period of consultations and review has been very lengthy and recommends, therefore, that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to finalize his instruction no later than 31 December 2016. Similarly, in its review of the latest annual activities of the Ethics Office, the Committee highlights the matter of the revised policy for Protection against Retaliation which has been under development for more than two years. The Committee recommends that this revised policy also be finalized by the end of 2016.

Concerning the proposed amendments to the Staff Regulations and Rules relating to the implementation of the changes to the compensation package, the Committee would have expected that the amended texts to the rules would have reflected the implementation dates mandated by the General Assembly. The Committee reaffirms the general principle that proposals to amend the Staff Regulations and Rules must follow the decisions of the General Assembly.

Madam Chairperson,

Finally, on the question of the reporting cycles, the Advisory Committee concurs with proposals to change the reporting cycles in the case of the Composition report and the annual report on the activities of the Ethics Office. The Committee also sees merit in harmonizing the reporting cycle of all reports relating to human resources management, including on the annual report on the system of administration of justice. Going one step further, the Committee is of the view that these changes should be seen in the larger context of efforts to rationalize the General Assembly's programme of work. Consideration could be given to realigning and harmonizing the issuance of all human-resources related reports so that the Advisory Committee could consider them earlier in the year and then the General Assembly could advance its own consideration of these reports.

Before I conclude, let me make a few general comments on the timeliness of the Committee's reports coming before you in the current session. This matter is very much connected to the delays experienced this year in the issuance of the annual financial statements and the related reports of the Board of Auditors. These reports are normally taken up at the beginning of the Advisory Committee's fall session, but this has not been possible this year. I understand that this has also affected the Programme of Work for the Fifth Committee. On our side, we have attempted to rearrange the Advisory Committee's consideration of items to ensure that the General Assembly is able to take up other agenda items earlier. A case in point is the report you have before you today which is being introduced three weeks earlier than the Committee's report on this same subject from two years ago. We will, of course endeavour to continue our efforts to ensure that the Advisory Committee's reports are issued in a timely fashion.

Thank you.