

**Statement to the Fifth Committee – Human Resources Management agenda
item**

Delivered by Ian Richards, designated representative of the staff unions of the
United Nations

At the United Nations Headquarters, New York
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Excellencies, distinguished delegates.

I speak on behalf of the staff unions of the UN Secretariat, funds and programmes.

General service

We support the proposal to allow GS and FS staff to apply directly to P-1, P-2 or P-3 posts that are not earmarked for the young professionals programme. It brings the UN Secretariat in line with the agencies, funds and programmes.

General Service staff are penalized compared to external candidates when applying for professional posts as they are excluded regardless of qualifications or experience. Unlike the past, many now have Masters degrees and are regularly asked to take on professional assignments. The route offered by the G to P exam is extremely restrictive.

Rehiring of retirees

We are firmly opposed to raising the earnings limit for retired staff members in receipt of pension benefits to 125 working days of the last salary, especially in light of the JIU report on succession planning.

The current \$22,000 limit restricts double-dipping and minimizes rehiring of retirees at the expense of current or new staff.

One reason the mandatory age of separation was raised to 65 was to cut back on rehiring of retirees.

Temporary appointments

We do not support the proposal to eliminate the six-month break in service for temporary staff moving to fixed term appointments on the same post.

The original rationale of the break in service was “to restrict the practice of making temporary appointments against regular budget posts or extra-budgetary posts of one year or more.”

It will mainstream recruitment to career positions via temporary appointments, or the back door. It will also disadvantage external candidates. Our concern is all the more important given that as vacancies are now advertized only twice a year instead of when they become available, temporary job openings are now increasingly used to fill the gap.

Mobility

UN staff firmly disagree with the proposal for vacant positions at B, C, D and E duty stations to be included in a managed mobility exercise.

Most mobility is intended to take place through the vacancy track allowing staff to apply, within their post incumbency period, for posts of their choosing including at higher levels. For those still on their posts at the end of their incumbency period, the managed mobility exercise laterally assigned to a new post that may not be of their choosing. This system, which you decided on, encourages staff to move in good time through the vacancy track rather than face the uncertainty of the management mobility exercise. Management’s proposal

will therefore hinder opportunities for staff to apply to new posts, eliminate opportunities for promotion to positions in the field and severely limit opportunities for external candidates.

In the first semi-annual exercise OHRM did not clearly explain to staff that volunteering to the managed mobility exercise could lead to them being assigned to a location not of their choosing. Given the miscommunication, the job network board took a conservative approach and did not assign staff to a location they did not choose. Further, this being a voluntary year, the pool of volunteers was small.

In any case mobility should only be reviewed after POLNET has been in operation for a full year of non-voluntary management mobility.

General cognitive tests

We have concerns, like ACABQ, with the use of general cognitive testing. Feedback from staff is that it favours native English speakers and the questions on situational analysis are made in a very US-centric context.

Amendments of the staff rules

We disagree with amendment to staff rule 9.9 (b). Under the proposal, staff who commit sexual exploitation and abuse would be charged their accumulated annual leave. While heinous acts outside the workplace can be cause for dismissal, we, and some members of management, have legal concerns with the organization charging staff a deferred salary that they have already contractually earned for an act that has no financial implication for the organization. It is also arbitrary as different staff will have different levels of accumulated leave.

We also disagree with the amendment to staff rule 3.6 under which the determination of the dependency of a spouse should be made on the basis of all spousal income, including pensions and other retirement-related income. The

Secretary-General misleadingly claims this was recommended by the ICSC. It wasn't.

Global Service Delivery Model

We have concerns with GSDM. It is based on the assumption that Umoja works. The truth is that it is still struggling, despite its \$1 billion price tag, with some colleagues still waiting months to receive benefits and pay.

Once Umoja is stabilized there will be an opportunity to study this further. At the moment there is too little data to make a clear case. It may indeed be the case that for many processes centralization and offshoring ends up costing more, as a number of governments and companies have discovered, too late. The predecessor of GSDM, the global field support strategy, has a poor reputation for service delivery.

Flexible workspace

We note that no evidence has been put forward demonstrating the productivity benefits of flexible workspace in the UN – and you're unlikely to find much outside either. And given, as some delegations have pointed out, salaries account for 75 percent of total costs, there is a strong risk that productivity losses will cost more than rental gains.

While the 13th, 18th and 19th floors are certainly pretty, normal given their renovation cost, the evidence has not been encouraging. Staff report that constant interruptions and distractions affect productivity. Some just keep the same desk every day, demonstrating the pointlessness of a cosmetic exercise for which you are now being asked to spend an additional \$66 million. At that price, the only gains will be to the furniture company that gets the contract.

On the Strategic Heritage Plan, a study by a Swiss firm specializing in office health showed that the nature of the work (90 percent at desk instead of in

meetings) and the stress levels at 45 percent (compared to a Swiss average of 30 percent) demonstrated the unsuitability of flexible workspace.

Whistleblower protection

We are concerned that the organization wants to revise the UN's policy on protection from retaliation by reducing the scope of what constitutes protected activities. Under what is being discussed, staff reporting minor breaches of the rules or charter would not be protected. Protection would only be provided to those reporting major breaches. With it not being clear what is minor or major, and why the distinction is there, staff will likely report nothing at all, undermining the policy's initial objective.

Staff-management relations

Actions by the Secretary-General's representatives have led to a marked decline in staff-management relations, preventing open and constructive dialogue. Those actions include:

- The reluctance of the Secretary-General's administration to share information in a timely manner to enable constructive dialogue on the Global Service Delivery Model.
- The concealing of the report prepared by Judge Otis on reform of the Ethics Office – a report that was paid for by Member States.
- The regrettable act by the Secretary-General to make proposals to the General Assembly governing temporary appointments, use of retired staff and mobility policy (see above) without discussing them first at the Staff-Management Committee (SMC).
- The implementation of an administrative instruction allowing the Secretary-General to freely outplace his staff, while the matter is still under consideration at SMC.
- Informing the General Assembly that mandatory age of separation at 65 will be implemented in 2018, when an earlier date is under consideration at the Staff-Management Committee.

We ask that the General Assembly recommend that the Secretary-General re-establish meaningful staff-management dialogue.

Unpaid interns

We reiterate our call for the Secretary-General to prepare a report on the implications of providing stipends to interns at the UN. Our organization is one of the few international organizations not providing a stipend and therefore not providing a level playing field to those from developing countries. Given your concerns about geographical diversity, the internship programme can be a useful form of outreach to future talent from non-traditional backgrounds.

With that I thank you.