

Agenda item 141: Human Resources Management

Statement by staff to the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly
Ian Richards, Designated representative of staff

Good morning and thank you for hearing the views of the 80,000 UN staff. I will also cover issues related to management reform as there isn't a separate chance to address these.

Change in the staff regulations

We support the proposed change in staff regulations to align with the General Assembly's decision at its 70th session to enable all staff on board on 1 January 2018 to work until 65.

Mobility policy

We take note of the decision to pause and review the mobility policy, which in its two years of operation has generated a number of complaints from staff, which include:

- slowness in filling vacancies, slowing career development and leading to a concurrent rise in temporary appointments to fill the gap;
- devaluation of specialized knowledge;
- hours of online testing backed by deficient IT;
- over-centralization; and
- the concurrent reduction in mobility- and field-related allowances.

Further, the last managed mobility exercise in July 2016 was only able to move 22 of the 241 staff that wanted a new assignment - a 9 percent success rate. This despite the large number of staff assigned to make it work.

Global service delivery model

We remain concerned at the proposed global service delivery model. The Secretariat currently comprises a number of administrative centres offering varying levels of price, quality and services to suit the needs of different clients. Over the past year (following the UMOJA roll out), this competition has driven improvements in costs and efficiency.

The current proposal would eliminate the current competitive market in provision of administrative services and replace it with a monopoly provider with no incentive to improve costs and standards or innovate. It will also move clients further away from service providers. The outcome will be detrimental to speed, quality and client satisfaction.

Gender strategy

On the gender strategy, staff unions have long been calling for a fully diverse workplace with an enabling environment that does not put women at a disadvantage compared to men, and free of sexual harassment. As the strategy makes clear, tackling issues such as the higher departure of women mid-career requires concrete resources, including on issues such as childcare, shared and extended parental leave, and increased outreach and leadership

training, which we urge you to fund. It is also time to update the policy on preventing sexual harassment, and to promulgate a related administrative instruction on investigations and disciplinary matters, for which consultations were completed last year.

With regards to target-setting and timelines for achieving parity, these should be realistic and take into account current demography, a shrinking pool of posts, forecast retirements of 0.5 percent a year, greater departures of women mid-career, an average joining age of 41 and the concurrent need to ensure geographic diversity. Any HR policy must also motivate hard-working women and men with promotion opportunities.

Budget

This year the Committee will analyse budget submissions for 2018-19. With its aim of promoting rejuvenation and keeping costs in control, we would like to raise our concerns once again at the long-term trend of reducing junior posts while increasing senior posts. We wonder whether this really is in the interests of the organization.

Flexible workspace

Following New York, the Committee is considering implementation in other duty stations. It should note the survey results of New York staff on hot-desking floors, which showed that:

- 47 percent reported hot-desking affected productivity negatively (26 percent positively);
- 58 percent reported it affected concentration negatively (8 percent positively);
- 25 percent reported increased exposure to contagious illness;
- staff also reported losing time at the start and end of the day setting up and clearing their desks.

Based on these results, it can be argued that any savings in real-estate costs are likely be outweighed by productivity losses.

Fixed-term contracts

You will recall that Resolution 65/247 “urges the Secretary-General to consider granting five-year fixed-term contracts to staff members” who qualify for continuing contracts with five years of continuous service and good performance, but who fall outside the post envelope. This was done in part to encourage longer-term workforce planning.

However, some departments, such as OIOS, UNODC, ESCAP and ESCWA, have failed to do so, leading to a two-track system within the UN, adding additional administrative workload and creating unnecessary uncertainty for good performing staff who need to make medium-term plans. We ask that the Secretary-General be urged to issue five-year contracts, subject to the conditions stipulated, on a consistent basis.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to following up informally with you on these matters of mutual concern.