



16 November 2017

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates of the Fifth Committee,
UN management and staff representatives,

It is an honor to address the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly on behalf of the members of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) on common system issues.

Mr. Chairman,

Let me start with the most important issue for staff on the agenda of this session, followed by some other concerns.

1. The cost-of-living surveys for staff in the Professional and higher categories

The latest round of cost-of-living surveys conducted at headquarters duty stations in 2016 had produced some alarming results, especially for Geneva and European-based UN and common system organizations. The results were contested not only based on the methodology, but also on the manner in which the calculations were carried out. The Organizations produced a 70-page report detailing the irregularities and discrepancies. We can share this report with you. As such, there is a need to revisit the calculations that led to the final results. This is requested by staff and organizations to safeguard the principle of fairness, transparency and to protect the integrity of the system. Not doing so would lead to litigation which may turn out to be extremely costly, disruptive and would harm staff morale. We respectfully request the Fifth Committee to consider this matter and the grave consequences that it could have on the principles cited above.

On the same matter, we strongly urge the Fifth Committee to look into the issue of the gap closure measure which is an operational rule initially designed to address margins of error due to discrepancies and uncertainty relative to the data collected and used to measure the cost of living.

The 5% gap closure measure for headquarters duty stations was removed in 2015 citing non usage of this protective measure as the reason for its deletion against the concerns of the staff federations. After the 2016 round of cost-of-living surveys at headquarters duty stations, the ICSC realized the need for the gap closure measure after all, and re-introduced it at 3% rather than its original level of 5%. FICSA has questioned the logic of deciding on an amount of 3% and firmly believes that it should be set at its original level of 5%. We appeal to the Fifth Committee to rectify this unjustified decision to ensure that this mechanism is applied as it was intended to be used.

FICSA sees a major reason to revise the cost-of-living survey methodology, and we believe that this can only be done through a tripartite working group, comprised of the ICSC, organizations and staff representatives. The ICSC acknowledged the need for the review and is seeking the services of a consultant for that purpose. FICSA, however, believes that a consultant would be costly and would produce one-sided results, and that it would be better to conduct the review through a tripartite working group under the umbrella of the ICSC. This would be less costly, more efficient and enhance transparency. The final report would be presented to the 73rd session of the General Assembly.

2. UN reform

We fully acknowledge and believe that major reform is required. However, we believe that reform needs to be comprehensive, involve everyone concerned, and that it should cover the whole common system rather than a piece meal approach. It is not only about policies and restructuring a unit here and a unit there.

The reform needs to start with the Member States (which have a different Governing Body in each organization), mandates, duplication of services, duty stations, offices, bureaucracy and the classification of posts. It needs to be a major project and, quoting the ILO management at the 34th HLCM Session, "Reform needs to be carried out with staff fully participating in the process". FICSA is more than willing to work with the UN and organizations to implement a true reform with long-lasting positive effects.

In short, the current UN reform proposal is in no way a final product. In fact, a totally different approach is required.

3. Mandatory age of separation

We would like to bring to your kind attention the fact that almost all common system organizations have complied with GA Resolution 70/244 (document A/RES/70/244 dated 8 February 2016), and will implement the mandatory age of separation of 65 for existing staff recruited before 1 January 2014, without prejudice to their acquired rights, by 1 January 2018.

FICSA notes that some organizations will not comply with the GA Resolution in respect of the date of implementation. ICAO, UNAIDS and WHO will implement on 1 January 2019, while WIPO will only implement on 1 January 2020.

FICSA notes with extreme regret that two organizations, FAO and WFP, have not even decided on a date of implementation. Accordingly, we seek your kind support to bring those organizations in line with the resolution adopted by this General Assembly.

4. United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund

FICSA acknowledges that much progress has been made in addressing the issue of processing pensions for newly retired staff in a timely manner. We thank the General Assembly, UN management and the common system organizations for this improvement.

On a second note, we see no reason for the granting of additional financial and human resources to the Pension Fund above the level of its 2017 budget, nor any need for upgrading positions at the Pension Fund secretariat and, in this respect, urge the Fifth Committee to not approve any requests for increases in resources.

5. Whistleblowing

Last but not least, we thank the UN and the UN Staff Unions for the tireless work made in revising the UN Policy on Whistleblowing, and we look forward to having a better system put into place. We still note, however, the lack of staff's access to external arbitration, and we hope this adjustment to the whistleblower policy will take place soonest.

The progress made should not let us forget the few whistleblowers who brought this whole issue to our attention in the first place and who, accordingly, need to be fully protected by this policy and also have their grievances addressed. We hope that the pending cases of those whistleblowers will be acknowledged and addressed in a timely manner.

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Delegates,

On behalf of the staff, I would like to sincerely thank you for your time, understanding and support relative to our concerns as expressed to you today.

I thank you for your kind attention.