



UNITED NATIONS DISPUTE TRIBUNAL

Case No.: UNDT/GVA/2014/137, 139,
140, 142, 143, 144, 145, 150,
151, 157, 158, 164, 166, 169,
173, 174, 180, 188, and 208

Judgment No.: UNDT/2015/024

Date: 24 March 2015

Original: English

Before: Judge Thomas Laker

Registry: Geneva

Registrar: René M. Vargas M.

Applicants UNHCR*

v.

SECRETARY-GENERAL
OF THE UNITED NATIONS

SUMMARY JUDGMENT

Counsel for Applicant:

Self-represented

Counsel for Respondent:

Karen M. Farkas, UNHCR

* The present Judgment applies to 19 Applicants who filed individual applications. A list showing each Applicant's last name and case number is attached.

Introduction

1. Each of the Applicants, General staff members of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (“UNHCR”), India, in the service of the Organization from a date prior to 1 November 2014, filed a motion for extension of time to file an application against “the decision of [United Nations Office of Human Resources Management, International Civil Service Commission] (“UN/OHRM/ICSC”) that the comprehensive salary survey conducted in New Delhi, India, in June 2013 found that the current salaries for locally-recruited staff are above the labour market”, as contained in the UN/OHRM cable of 1 October 2014.

2. The Applicants state that:

[c]onsequently, there has been no revision of salary scales after the comprehensive survey for staff members already on board prior to 01/11/2014, including the Applicant. The decision communicates that the eligible staff already on board prior to 01/11/2014 will continue to be on GS 61 and NO 21, being the earlier salary scale before the comprehensive salary survey in June 2013. Amendments to salary scale revision 61 for the General Service category and revision 21 for the National Officer category, payable to eligible staff already on board prior to 1 November 2014, are issued to reflect revised allowances (the child and language allowance have been revised downward).

3. Having reviewed the Applicants’ submissions, the Tribunal is of the view that it is not necessary to grant an extension of time for filing an application, since the filings are sufficient to be regarded as—incomplete—applications.

Facts

4. A Comprehensive Local Salary Survey was conducted in New Delhi in June 2013, and the results of the survey were promulgated by OHRM on its website, as reflected in its cable dated 1 October 2014, in the following terms:

Subject: New Delhi (India) local salaries

(AAA) following the comprehensive salary survey conducted in New Delhi in June 2013, this is to advise you that the results of the survey indicate that salaries for locally recruited staff are above the labour market when compared with the remuneration package of the retained comparators by 13.4 per cent for general service (GGSS) category and 19.4 per cent for national officer category. accordingly, the following salary scales are issued:

- (1) GS 62 and no 22, both effective 1 June 2013, payable only to staff recruited on or after one November 2014. revised net salaries reflect downward adjustment of (-) 13.4 per cent for GGSS and (-) 19.4 per cent for NNOO.
- (2) amend. one to GS 61 and no 21, effective 1 July 2012, payable to eligible staff already on board prior to one November 2014, the amendments are issued to reflect revised allowances.

(BBB) revised allowances in rupees net per annum are as follows:

- (1) child, per child, subject to maximum of six children
 - a. 23,511 applicable to staff members for whom the allowance becomes payable on or after one November 2014;
 - b. 27,156 applicable to staff members for whom the allowance becomes payable prior to one November 2014;
- (2) first language
 - a. 29,532 applicable to staff members for whom the allowance becomes payable on or after one November 2014;
 - b. 34,104 applicable to staff members for whom the allowance becomes payable prior to one November 2014;

(3) second language

- a. 14,766 applicable to staff members for whom the allowance becomes payable on or after one November 2014;
- b. 17,052 applicable to staff members for whom the allowance becomes payable prior to one November 2014.

5. In the applications, it is stressed that the salary freeze is causing the Applicants grave prejudice and that to allow the Applicants to challenge the survey and the results thereof, the list of comparators interviewed and retained during the 2013 salary survey should be shared with the Applicants.

Consideration

6. As a preliminary matter, since the present individual applications concern identical decisions, rely on common facts and raise the same questions of fact and law, and since all Applicants are staff members of UNHCR, India, the Tribunal considers it appropriate to adjudicate upon them jointly. Therefore, a single judgment is issued in respect of the 19 applications.

7. The Tribunal recalls that its jurisdiction is limited, and that the General Assembly has emphasized more than once that the Tribunals of the new system of administration of justice shall not have any powers beyond those conferred under their respective statutes (see, e.g., para. 5 of A/RES/67/241, adopted on 24 December 2012). In particular, the scope of the Tribunal's jurisdiction is clearly determined and limited by art. 2.1(a) of its Statute, which provides:

Article 2

1. The Dispute Tribunal shall be competent to hear and pass judgement on an application filed by an individual, as provided for in article 3, paragraph 1, of the present statute, against the Secretary-General as the Chief Administrative Officer of the United Nations:

(a) To appeal an administrative decision that is alleged to be in non-compliance with the terms of appointment or the contract of employment.

8. The Tribunal notes that the Appeals Tribunal recently recalled the definition of an administrative decision in its judgement *Al Surkhi et al.* 2013-UNAT-304, by quoting the definition developed by the former Administrative Tribunal of the United Nations in Judgement *Andronov* No. 1157 (2003), namely that:

[i]t is acceptable by all administrative law systems, that an “administrative decision” is a unilateral decision taken by the administration in a precise individual case (individual administrative act), which produces direct legal consequences to the legal order. Thus, the administrative decision is distinguished from other administrative acts, such as those having regulatory power (which are usually referred to as rules or regulations), as well as from those not having direct legal consequences. Administrative decisions are therefore characterized by the fact that they are taken by the Administration, they are unilateral and of individual application, and they carry direct legal consequences.

9. The Tribunal further recalls its recent Judgment *Tintukasiri et al.* UNDT/2014/026, in which it held with respect to the decision to freeze salary scales that:

[the] decision is of a general order, in that it concerns all eligible General Service staff and National Officers in Bangkok on board prior to 1 March 2012. As such, the circle of persons to whom the salary freeze applies is not defined individually but by reference to the status and category of these persons within the Organization, at a specific location and at a specific point in time. Moreover, the decision will apply for a duration which, at the time it was taken and as at today, cannot be determined. Indeed, nobody can predict when the gap flagged by the survey will be closed, hence the actual duration of the salary freeze is unknown ... Accordingly, the

Tribunal concludes that in applying the test of *Andronov*, the decision to freeze existing salary scales ... does not constitute an administrative decision for the purpose of art. 2.1(a) of the Tribunal's Statute.

10. The Tribunal finds that Judgement *Tintukasiri et al.* and the present application deal with identical matters. Indeed, the main facts of *Tintukasiri et al.* are summarized in the above-referenced Judgment of the Dispute Tribunal as follows:

17. The 2011 Comprehensive Local Salary Survey was conducted from June to December 2011.

18. On 10 January 2012, an [Local Salary Survey Committee ("LSSC")] meeting was held, to consider and sign the LSSC report prepared by the salary survey specialists, by 11 January 2013, for presentation to the Headquarters Salary Steering Committee. The results of the survey indicated that United Nations salaries for the General Service and National Officer categories were higher than those of the retained comparators, by 27.2% and 41.4% respectively.

19. On 13 January 2012, the findings of the salary survey specialists were presented to the Headquarters Salary Steering Committee, which unanimously approved the survey results and recommended freezing of salaries for staff members already on board and the implementation of secondary salary scales for staff member recruited after 1 March 2012.

20. The [OHRM] promulgated the salary survey results on its website on 6 February 2012, indicating that the salary scale applicable to staff already on board would be frozen "until the gap is closed", whereas secondary salary scales would be applied to staff recruited on or after 1 March 2012.

11. Judgment *Tintukasiri et al.* was appealed, and this Tribunal decided to suspend its proceedings in the present case until the outcome of said appeal was known.

12. On 26 February 2015, the Appeals Tribunal, in its public announcement of the outcome of its 2015 spring session, dismissed the appeal and upheld the above referenced Dispute Tribunal Judgement.

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13. It follows from the public announcement that the receivability findings of Judgment *Tintukasiri et al.* UNDT/2014/026 were confirmed without reservation by the Appeals Tribunal (Case No. 2015-UNAT-526). Considering that the Dispute Tribunal should “recognize, respect and abide by the Appeals Tribunal’s jurisprudence” (*Igbinedion* 2014-UNAT-410), it cannot but reiterate that the decision to freeze the existing salary scales and to review downward allowances did not constitute an administrative decision for the purpose of art. 2.1(a) of its Statute. The present applications are therefore not receivable, *ratione materiae*.

14. The above is a matter of law, which may be adjudicated even without serving the application to the Respondent for reply, and even if it was not raised by the parties (see *Gehr* 2013-UNAT-313, *Christensen* 2013-UNAT-335).

15. Therefore, the Tribunal decides on the present applications by way of summary judgement, in accordance with art. 9 of its Rules of Procedure, which provides that the Tribunal may determine, on its own initiative, that summary judgement is appropriate.

Conclusion

16. In view of the foregoing, the Tribunal DECIDES:

The applications be rejected.

(Signed)

Judge Thomas Laker

Dated this 24th day of March 2015

Entered in the Register on this 24th day of March 2015

(Signed)

René M. Vargas M., Registrar, Geneva

CASE NUMBER			APPLICANT LAST NAME	ORGANIZATION
UNDT	2014	137	Bhatia	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	139	MAHESH	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	140	CHELLAIAHPILLAI	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	142	ROZARIO	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	143	PAPPACHAN	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	144	KAKKAR	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	145	VERHESE	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	150	JENA	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	151	BHARDWAJ	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	157	SEHGAL	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	158	BALASUBRAMANIAN	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	164	DOGRA	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	166	TAWAKLEY	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	169	PANDIAN	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	173	MEHTA	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	174	MICHAEL	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	180	ZUTSHI	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	188	KUMAR	UNHCR
UNDT	2014	208	EZUNG	UNHCR