



Statement of Mr. Ridha Zargouni, President of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System (CCISUA)

Mr. Chairman and distinguished delegates of the Fifth Committee, Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of CCISUA, I would like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the members of this Committee for giving us the opportunity to address you on issues of extreme importance to our Federation, whose membership includes nearly 40,000 staff members from 17 organizations of the United Nations Common System.

We would like to confine our remarks to a number of items of particular relevance to the UN Common System. However, while we note with satisfaction some progress in the level and quality of staff-management relations in the UN Secretariat with the recent establishment of the Staff Management Committee, we cannot avoid to express our frustrations about the fact that we are given just 300 seconds to speak, and little or no opportunity for interaction, to relay to you, our employers, the concerns and issues that are affecting many thousands of staff.

CCISUA participated at the sessions of the ICSC and we expressed our disappointment with the fact that Commissioners were not open to suggestions from the organizations or staff representatives regarding issues that should be taken into consideration when making decisions. Instead, the outcome seemed to be largely based on preconceived ideas regarding ways to undertake the deepest budget cuts. The Commission has made recommendations based on what it deemed "pragmatism" over clear, coherent, objective methodologies or with the objective to achieve the best operational results. CCISUA believes that questionable decisions, many of them affecting the conditions of service of staff in the field, and particularly in hardship duty stations, were taken with this approach. These decisions are now in front of you for your consideration and we hope that you will also take into account concerns from staff.

CCISUA recognizes the difficulty of the current financial crisis for the Member States and the need to be highly cost effective. However, some of the measures affecting considerably the conditions of service of staff, particularly in the field, and overall, are reducing the capacity of the organization to attract and retain staff with the "highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity". CCISUA is concerned about the reduction of incentives for service in the field at a time when in the Secretariat there are expectations for staff to be more mobile. Cutting costs should be an exercise of cutting the fat and not staff (the bones and the muscles) that are supporting this organization.

More specifically on the items contained in the report of the ICSC, we would like to express the following concerns and opinions.

On the mobility/hardship scheme, CCISUA opposes the de-linking it from the base/floor salary scale. CCISUA strongly criticizes the lack of transparency and objectivity in the Commission's decision, which in effect makes no reference to the adjustment factors as required by the methodology, preferring a so-called "pragmatic approach".

CCISUA regrets the significant reduction in the number of duty stations covered by danger pay. While it may be argued that the countries listed under "hazard pay" included countries with levels of danger that were less than others, up to now, and in introducing the new allowance, the full picture of the impact of the new criteria has never been clear. This was based on a number of subjective elements that require clarification. However, CCISUA welcomed the fact that this would be regularly – and not exceptionally –payable to qualifying locally-recruited staff, who represented a majority of casualties in attacks against the UN. CCISUA has serious concerns about decisions related to the determination of non-family duty stations because the lack of consideration of health and adverse living conditions.

CCISUA would like to stress the very subjective nature of the criteria, which includes terms such as "persistently" or "directly" targeted because, as we move away from a "when to leave" philosophy to one of "how to stay", this allowance should be provided to those who are directly targeted just because they work for the United Nations. As we have seen time and again, it is impossible to say this threat is persistent, permanent, direct or imminent, and we sometimes don't realize until after the threat has become an attack.

We are not talking about a generic threat. United Nations staff members are more and more frequently called upon to work in dangerous and hostile environments around the world, thereby becoming targets of hostility and violent attack. The recent attack on the United Nations premises in Abuja is just the latest in a series of attacks directed against United Nations staff in Afghanistan, Algeria, Pakistan, Somalia and Sudan, all of which have tragically resulted in numerous deaths and serious injuries.

On rest and recuperation CISSUA expressed concerns on the proposed change in the accounting of the days from five working days to five calendar days. The decision of the ICSC was taken without any open debate or discussion and does not result in a cost-savings, but appears only to be punishment for staff who work tirelessly in very difficult non-family duty stations, who may not even be aware of the damage to health and productivity from continuous stressful situations, and whose productivity for the organization increases with this simple measure. CCISUA believes that ICSC and the Member States, if they accept the recommendations, can even be de-facto legislating for staff members' weekends, which should be their time off. We consider this illegal and intend to challenge the decision if implemented.

CCISUA takes note of the report of the ICSC on the matter of pensionable remuneration. We are concerned that such an important aspect of the conditions of service of staff is not being discussed with the participation of staff. We are also aware of the fact that participants' representatives in the pension board have not been party to the study and in fact have asked to be appraised on the review.

We are very concerned about the contortions necessary for the UN Pension Fund to be compared with FERS. They are not at all comparable, as the ICSC Secretariat has found and as has been reported in the document. UN staff do not have the equivalent of Social Security benefits outside of the Pension Fund. In short, even though the US remains our comparator civil service, we believe it is time to detach the pension benefit from the comparison and look at other defined benefit schemes within and outside the US.

On performance management CCISUA would like to stress that Performance Management only reflects part of the equation, which runs from fair, open and transparent recruitment and selection systems to robust and dialogue-driven career planning and career development mechanisms.

CCISUA was pleased to see reference to "building a motivational environment where people feel that they are being dealt with fairly and given the opportunity for growth and development." We recall from the staff survey that those seeking to leave the organizations noted the lack of such opportunities as one of the factors influencing their decision. This remains, unfortunately, an area that is all too often overlooked.

We believe that the systems for rewarding performance and service to the organizations have evolved over time, and while we welcome new ways of looking to motivate staff and reward performance, we believe these rewards should be in addition to, rather than as a replacement of, existing mechanisms. We are unsure of the value added by changing the periodicity of the merit increments and believe that the current system of annual increments based on satisfactory performance should remain in place.

On the identification of the highest-paid civil service under the Noblemaire principle, CCISUA would like to reiterate the need to ensure that the comparison with national civil service is carried out in a complete manner and that recognition is given to the additional elements of hardship and mobility faced by UN staff who do not benefit from the support given by a national system.

UN staff feel frustrated at the current situation and perspectives related to the base salary. We know we are not immune to the economic difficulties many member states are suffering. On the contrary, the staff of the UN are actively engaged in addressing the fallout, and assisting Member States in building sustainable solutions to the current crisis, a crisis which, it must be said, has not been caused by public servants at the national or international levels but who are asked to carry a heavy burden of responsibility in responding to it.

The frustration is related to the lack of adherence to principles adopted by all UN member states. As an example of this situation, this Commission reviews every five years the terms and conditions in various national civil services to determine the system most likely to deliver on the Noblemaire Principle. The words of the 1945 Preparatory Commission of the United Nations should be recalled here, whereby the Commission recommended that the “salary and allowance scales for the staffs of the United Nations and the various specialized agencies ... should compare favourably to those of the most highly paid home and foreign services, due account being taken of the special factors affecting service in the United Nations.”

This study has not been conducted fully for at least 15 years and again this year only the first phase of the study was completed even though staff representatives have all asked the ICSC to complete the study. Due to this decision, the next review will only be in 2016.

Regarding post-adjustment, CCISUA participated in the meeting of ACPAQ and raised several issues in relation to methodology applied. For CCISUA the crucial ones are the weight of the out of area expenditure and the methodology and sources of rent data.

We have participated in the many meetings of this working group over the last two years, as the refinement of the GS salary survey methodology is crucial for a large number of staff. We have to say that we were reluctant about some of the recommendations that have emerged from the Working Group because we fear that they may have the effect of depressing salaries, or veering away from the Fleming principle.

On the Harmonization of conditions of service in the field CCISUA reiterates its disagreement with harmonization of conditions of service in non-family duty stations. In particular, the marked decrease in benefits for single staff members, who are those most likely to be able to work in the difficult non-family duty stations, discourage even their mobility.

In addition, on the Rest and recuperation framework, CCISUA would like to stress that the issue under consideration is not simply a matter of adjusting an entitlement, but that the end of the special operations approach as a comprehensive deployment modality has left staff in deep field duty stations in limbo. CCISUA believes that a holistic approach, which could not ignore issues related to where families reside and payment of the daily subsistence allowance, should be used. Abandoning the administrative place of assignment approach results in different treatment of staff based on their nationality. In such circumstances, the rest and recuperation policy must consider the options of sending staff back to their permanent place of residence, as do most national systems, or sending them to another location and paying the daily subsistence allowance. We support the frequencies as outlined in the paper, which had operated effectively for years, reflected the operational necessities of the organizations and could not be detached from the need to maintain a healthy and productive workforce with a prescribed

break from working days. CCISUA supports the higher-frequency rest and recuperation arrangements, which were for the most exceptional circumstances, and were greatly needed to ensure the best operational results.

