



UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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Statement on agenda item 141: UN Common System

By Ambassador Joseph M. Torsella, U.S. Representative for UN Management and Reform

Before the Fifth (Administrative and Budgetary) Committee

During the main part of the sixty-sixth session of the UN General Assembly

24 October 2011

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, I would like to thank Mr. Kingston Rhodes, Chairman of the International Civil Service Commission, for introducing the report of the ICSC; to Mr. Lionel Berridge for presenting the statement of the Secretary-General of the associated financial implications; and to Mr. Collen Kelapile for presenting the related report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions. We also welcome the presence of Mr. Mauro Pace, Mr. Claude Jumet, and Mr. Ridha Zargouni, who will be present to present the views of the staff federations on this important agenda item.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States remains firmly committed to the United Nations common system and strongly supports the work of the International Civil Service Commission in harmonizing the conditions of service throughout the agencies, funds and programs, and the Secretariat. Last year, the General Assembly—following recommendations of the ICSC—approved measures to eliminate disparities in the treatment of staff from different organizations serving in some of the most difficult places in the world. My delegation is pleased with the progress made thus far and expects that the Commission will continue to closely monitor the implementation of the harmonized conditions of service in non-family duty stations.

In its report for 2011, the Commission considered many other important issues such as replacement of hazard pay with danger pay and the survey methodology for General Service staff. With regard to the latter, we are concerned that the current practice of monetizing the value of some benefits provided by survey employers and then including such values in the base salaries misrepresents and inflates the amount actually paid by employers. More importantly, it unnecessarily increases benefits provided to General Service staff that are computed based on their salary levels. Accordingly, we are disappointed that the Commission has delayed making a decision on this issue and request that it be put on its schedule of work

for the next session. We also note the observations of the Commission on the net remuneration margin between United Nations professional staff and employees of the United States federal civil service.

The conditions of service for international professional staff should be determined in reference to the practices of the United States federal civil service under the Noblemaire principle. However, the recent action of the Commission to increase the post adjustment index in New York is at odds with this guiding principle of the international civil service.

Currently, federal employees in the United States are subject to a pay freeze. That pay freeze affects both base salary and locality pay. Last November, President Obama decided to freeze the U.S. locality pay—which is analogous to post adjustment in the United Nations—due to “serious economic conditions affecting the general welfare.” Although the U.S. freeze in salary is reflected in the base salaries of international professional staff, the U.S. freeze in locality pay is not reflected in post adjustment; in August the ICSC approved an increase in the post adjustment index that resulted in a nearly 3 percent increase in the compensation of the 4,800 international professional staff serving in New York.

Mr. Chairman, this increase is clearly not in line with the practice of the comparator. It is not appropriate—most member states are experiencing deep economic difficulties, and fiscal restraint is the order of the day. It is not necessary—international professional staff are already paid more generously than their counterparts in Washington and, for that matter, those serving in the civil services of the majority of Member States of the United Nations. The cost of this increase is not trivial. It undermines the Secretary General’s call for belt-tightening throughout the UN system. And it should be reversed.

My delegation recognizes, Mr. Chairman, how this happened; a pay freeze in the comparator is quite simply an extraordinary circumstance that the existing post adjustment system is not well-equipped to handle. We therefore request the ICSC to consider changes necessary to the system in order to prevent similar situations from arising again in the future. We are also concerned that a decision with such far-reaching implications did not come before the full membership of the ICSC for a decision, and therefore ask for that practice to be changed in the future.

In the meantime, my delegation strongly believes that the New York post adjustment index should be immediately restored to the level applicable in July and that the net remuneration for international professional staff in New York should remain at that level until the locality pay freeze for U.S. federal employees is lifted.

Mr. Chairman,

The United States appreciates the hard work and sacrifice of international staff who work tirelessly to realize the ideals contained in the United Nations Charter and the aspirations of an imperfect world. We are mindful of the hardships faced by those serving in difficult locations

around the world in the pursuit of these lofty goals. But all of us must acknowledge the economic context under which we work. My delegation therefore looks forward to working closely with all delegations and the Commission to ensure that all international staff members are treated equitably and compensated fairly, and that the organizations of the United Nations common system maintain their ability to attract staff who meet the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

