

Human resources management

Statement by the Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions to the Fifth Committee

(ACABQ report A/67/545)

Mr. Chairman,

I have the honour to introduce the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions on human resources management, which is contained in document A/67/545 and sets out the Committee's comments and recommendations on the seven human resources-related reports submitted to the General Assembly by the Secretary-General.

I turn first to the proposed mobility and career development framework, which is discussed in section III of the Advisory Committee's report. While the Committee believes that a better managed organizational mobility programme has the potential to contribute to improving the delivery of mandates and to respond better to the career aspirations of staff, it is not in a position to recommend approval of the proposed framework in its current form. The Committee is not convinced that the proposed framework fully addresses the problems it seeks to resolve or that it will yield all the benefits identified by the Secretary-General. In addition, the Committee considers that the Secretary-General's proposals are not sufficiently detailed.

Accordingly, in its report, the Advisory Committee highlights the elements of the proposal that require further clarification, development and/or adjustment. They include:

- The extent to which the impact of the proposed framework will vary depending on staff members' appointment type;
- The number and precise type of positions to be designated as non-rotational;
- Whether the proposed framework fully addresses the issue of sharing the burden of service in hardship duty stations;
- The expected number and configuration of the job networks and how they will be phased in;
- How promotions will fit within the proposed new selection and reassignment process;
- The effect of the proposal on external recruitment;
- The role of individual hiring managers in the proposed selection and reassignment process and the mechanism for ensuring the participation of representatives of staff in that process;
- The terms of reference, rules of procedure and operating guidelines of the job network boards and the special constraints panel;
- The full costs, direct and indirect, of the proposed framework.

The Secretary-General intends to begin implementation of the proposed mobility and career development framework on 1 January 2015. Consequently, the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit to it, no later than at the main part of its sixty-eighth session, a comprehensive report on the framework that addresses the issues raised in the Committee's report, including the need for more information and analysis to justify the move beyond a purely voluntary system towards a managed system of mobility.

In the meantime, the Advisory Committee believes that there is an urgent need to ensure a more equitable sharing of the burden of service in hardship duty stations, and takes the view

that measures to ameliorate the situation of staff who have served in hardship duty stations for long periods of time without being able to move are not contingent on General Assembly approval of the proposed mobility and career development framework. The Committee therefore recommends that the Assembly request the Secretary-General, when making selection decisions, to give, with immediate effect, priority among internal candidates to staff in that situation, and to propose subsequently any additional measures he deems necessary.

I turn now to the Advisory Committee's comments and recommendations on the overview of human resources management reform presented by the Secretary-General, which are set out in section II of its report. Overall, while recognizing the continuing efforts of the Secretary-General to address the issues raised by the General Assembly in its resolutions 63/250 and 65/247, the Committee believes that much remains to be done. The Committee's report contains its views on a number of human resources-related issues, including workforce planning, learning and career development and staff-management relations.

To mention a few of the Committee's specific recommendations, in the area of staff selection and recruitment the Committee is concerned that the 120-day target for filling a post has still not been reached. It takes the view that a meaningful reduction in the time taken to recruit will be achieved only if the causes of delays, particularly at the "recommendation of candidates" stage, are addressed and those responsible held accountable. The Committee is recommending that the Assembly request the Secretary-General to investigate the reasons for delays at each stage of the recruitment process and to propose appropriate measures to deal with the issues identified.

On performance management, while the Advisory Committee welcomes the development of a rewards and recognition framework, it is concerned about the shortcomings identified in the current system of sanctions for underperformance. The Committee is therefore recommending that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to take, as a matter of priority, all necessary steps to address those shortcomings.

On the young professionals programme (YPP), the Advisory Committee recommends that the General Assembly confirm the Secretary-General's understanding that placement of successful YPP candidates should be made at the P-1 or P-2 level, depending on whether their qualifications satisfy the requirements of the relevant job description and on the availability of posts. Furthermore, the Committee has no objection to the Secretary-General's proposal that the Assembly endorse the amendments to the learning and development component of the programme, or to the proposed continuation of the "G to N" arrangement. The Committee also welcomes the efforts made by the Secretary-General to "right-size" the national competitive recruitment examination roster.

In his overview report, the Secretary-General describes the measures taken and envisaged to increase the representation of various groups of Member States in the Secretariat. In the Committee's view, the efforts undertaken to date have been ineffective, and it therefore recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to develop a comprehensive strategy to improve geographical representation, based on an in-depth analysis of the real causes of the current imbalances. Concrete proposals should be submitted to the Assembly as part of the next report on human resources management.

With regard to the system of desirable ranges, the Advisory Committee considers it regrettable that the Secretary-General has failed, on successive occasions, to respond appropriately to the request of the Assembly that he present proposals for a comprehensive review of the system. The Committee believes that the requests contained in resolutions 63/250 and 65/247 provide sufficient guidance as to the issues that should be addressed by such proposals, and therefore expects that the relevant proposals will be submitted as soon as possible, and no later than at the sixty-eighth session.

The Committee comments further on the situation of staff subject to the system of desirable ranges in section IV of its report. While noting that some progress has been made in terms of increasing the number of posts subject to the system of desirable ranges that are encumbered by staff having geographical status, the Committee remains concerned by the large proportion of such posts that are not encumbered by those staff. The Committee therefore recommends that the Assembly request the Secretary-General to take concrete measures to address this issue.

The issue of liabilities from administrative service arrangements entered into by the United Nations Secretariat is discussed in paragraphs 64 to 67 of the Advisory Committee's report. In light of recent jurisprudence affirming the financial liability of an administering entity for administrative decisions taken in respect of staff members of an employing entity, the Committee believes that this is a matter of serious concern requiring urgent attention. It recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to work with the entities concerned in order to amend all administrative service arrangements to ensure that the Secretariat cannot be held financially liable for administrative decisions taken by employing entities.

The Advisory Committee has also considered the reports of the Secretary-General on the composition of the Secretariat, practice in disciplinary matters and amendments to the Staff Rules. With regard to the composition report, the Committee welcomes the inclusion of commentary on demographic trends affecting the Secretariat but believes that, in future, the Secretary-General should go further in his analysis by, for example, identifying the reasons for the emergence of particular patterns.

As far as the amendments to the Staff Rules are concerned, the Advisory Committee is dissatisfied with the format of the Secretary-General's report, taking the view that it could be more reader-friendly. The Committee therefore recommends that, in future, proposed amendments to rules and regulations be presented in such a way as to allow readers to compare them to the existing text, with deletions and additions highlighted for ease of reference. In addition, with specific reference to the amendment to rule 4.12 on temporary appointments, the Advisory Committee emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the rules and regulations of the Organization accurately reflect the language used in relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

The last section of the Advisory Committee's report, section VII, contains the Committee's comments and recommendations on the activities of the Ethics Office for the period from 1 August 2011 to 31 July 2012. They touch, inter alia, on the Office's role in procurement ethics, the protection of staff against retaliation for reporting misconduct, the development of ethics evaluation criteria and the implementation of the financial disclosure programme. With regard to the latter, the Advisory Committee commends the Ethics Office for its efforts to ensure full compliance with the requirements of the programme and trusts that the Secretary-General will continue to encourage senior officials to participate in the voluntary public disclosure initiative. As for the Office's ongoing efforts to better determine the filing population based on the risk profile of the Organization, the Committee points out that any expansion of the filing population may have financial implications.