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***Statement by  
Ms. Paulina Analena, President  
of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and  
Associations of the United Nations System (CCISUA)***

**Agenda Item 141: United Nations Common System  
New York, 13 November 2013**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman,

On behalf of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff unions and Associations of the United Nations common System (CCISUA), I wish to congratulate you and the other members of the Bureau of the Fifth Committee on your election. We wish to also thank Ms. Sharon Van Buerle and colleagues from the Secretariat of the Committee for coordination for our intervention. We also wish to thank Mr. Kingston Rhodes, Chairman of the International civil Service Commission, for the introduction of the ICSC annual report.

Distinguished Members of the Fifth Committee,

I have the honor to represent more than 60,000 United Nations staff who work around the globe. Coming from 17 Staff Unions and Associations who coordinate as members of CCISUA, these staff aspire to a world that will provide hope and opportunity for every person they reach, and support to every government requesting assistance from their organizations.

Many of these colleagues carry out challenging and even life-threatening assignments far from their families and homes, including conducting disarmament in Syria and coordinating the provision of much-needed humanitarian aid to the Philippines.. Because the mandates of the UN organizations that employ them were created and continuously refined by Member States, CCISUA deeply appreciates your commitment to hearing the voices of those who daily strive to realize complex humanitarian goals.

The fundamental principles of consultation and inclusion underpin good management and the ethics of the UN System. Thus it is with deep conviction, and also in good faith, that I address you on issues of fundamental importance to the professional lives and endeavors of our dedicated colleagues.

CCISUA believes that the United Nations Common System constitutes the best instrument to secure the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity for the international civil service, as stipulated in the United Nations Charter. We support it as it ensures consistency in the conditions of employment throughout the UN System, promotes coherence and equality, and fosters efficiency.

CCISUA supports a technical analysis of issues and compliance with well accepted methodologies that have served us well, with appropriate adjustments, over the last half of a century. Any changes need to be well considered and analyzed in the light of international rules, regulations, and practices and even, in some cases, international laws that have been confirmed through legal considerations.

I will address the various issues before you under this agenda item of the “United Nations Common System”, in the order in which they are raised in the report of the International Civil Service Commission.

### **Review of the common system compensation package**

In April of this year, the General Assembly requested the ICSC, while conducting a comprehensive review of the compensation package for staff in the Professional and higher categories, to bear in mind the financial situation of the organizations participating in the United Nations common system and their capacity to attract a competitive workforce. It also requested the Commission to inform it of the progress and administrative aspects of the comprehensive review during the main part of its Sixty-eighth and Sixty-ninth sessions and to report on the final conclusions and recommendations as soon as possible but no later than during the main part of its Seventieth session.

CCISUA was pleased to participate in the initial steps of the compensation package review, although we voiced concerns that the review may have been provoked by a dismaying trend to view staff increasingly as financial liabilities – very different from earlier references to them as critically important contributors to the values and goals of the United Nations. There is a long list of issues that need to be fully examined, including basic concepts about whether a UN staff member can be compared to a staff member in the private sector or whether that may lead to a negation of the very basis on which the Noblemaire principle was established.

We understand that some Member States would like to propose changes to the current compensation system, more specifically regarding the net remuneration margin, during this session of the Fifth Committee. CCISUA respectfully asks that the results from the review of the compensation package be considered before any

changes to the existing system are proposed, This would certainly contribute to a more productive implementation of the exercise. The review is holistic; to change certain aspects of the *status quo* at this point might, in our view, compromise its final result

The General Assembly requested a technically sound report on the common system compensation package and we do not think that this is where the current path leads. CCISUA asks your support, Mr. Chairman, to encourage a fully collaborative and open process that will reassure all parties, including the staff who will be affected by the decisions related to this exercise.

### **Mandatory age of separation**

In para. 76 of its report, the ICSC recommends that the General Assembly ... raise the mandatory age of separation (MAS) to age 65 for *current* staff members effective 1 January 2016.

CCISUA was pleased to see the changes in the MAS recently agreed for new staff, and supports the ICSC recommendation that the increase in the MAS change be extended as a choice for existing staff. Several factors support this change: (i) worldwide trends on increases in the retirement age, linked to increasing longevity, productivity and subsequent longer years as pensioners; (ii) the differential between the years worked at the UN and the retirement years; (iii) the potential positive impact on the financial position of the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund; and (iv) recognition that this would keep pace with international and government trends to increase or eliminate retirement age.

When we surveyed our members for their opinions about changes in the MAS, they were largely supportive as long as an increase would not affect the acquired rights of staff who currently can continue to retire without penalty at the age of 60 or 62. The number of those staff will continue to decrease due to normal attrition, but giving staff the option to stay a few years longer will allow them to contribute longer to the UN Joint Staff Pension Fund, and will allow organizations to take advantage of their skills and experience.

We are aware that some may argue that increasing the mandatory retirement age for existing staff could negatively impact the UN's efforts to rejuvenate the work force, or undermine efforts towards improving geographical balance. Those are strategies that should have been incorporated long ago in organizations' workforce planning. We are unconvinced that a small percentage of staff choosing to work a few years longer would negatively affect long-term administration of human resources in the United Nations. The change would, instead, offset the need for executive heads to make decisions on a case-by-case basis, and could help to address other problems such as career stagnation or grade distribution when longer serving staff at higher grades are granted extensions to stay on in their posts or are brought back to fill vacancies, rather than promoting younger staff.

CCISUA highlights the value of capitalizing on investments in existing staff. We reiterate that denying this choice to current staff or using retirement age issues, particularly for a span of just a few years, does not provide a solution to performance management problems nor to strategic workforce planning. We appreciate that the ICSC supports a rational approach amenable to staff.

### **Base/floor salary scale**

The conditions of service for UN staff are, it goes without saying, of critical importance to their morale and ability to function, especially when they relentlessly put their own lives on the line to serve others, while accepting separation from their families, homes and cultures.

In para. 82, the Commission recommends to the General Assembly, for approval with effect from 1 January 2014, the revised base/floor salary scale for the Professional and higher categories as shown in its annex III.

We must mention here that we are disappointed that the post adjustment system has not been allowed to function in accordance with the methodology agreed by the General Assembly. CCISUA recognizes the value of the Commission's advice, but we are concerned about insufficient focus on basic principles such as the Noblemaire principle, which aims to ensure competitiveness of United Nations remuneration in order to attract a diverse and highly talented workforce without resorting to comparison with the private sector.

Staff members are a critical asset, not an "expense". Without staff, no mandate of the United Nations can be delivered anywhere – including conducting disarmament in Syria and coordinating the provision of food, shelter and other much-needed humanitarian aid to the Philippines. Every single day, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, staff risk their very lives and sacrifice their family relationships in order to carry out the work of the United Nations as determined by its Member States. Staff support, guide and execute the programs, and they deliver results. They deserve to be recognized for their dedication and to be compensated accordingly.

Mr. Chairman,

Much is said of the proportion of staff costs in the overall UN budget, but the fact is that the value of the United Nations is the leadership and support that staff can bring to national programs. The United Nations functions through its staff members, who coordinate, support, guide and execute the programs mandated by Member States, and who ensure that resources are brought together in synergy to achieve the humanitarian and development objectives of the United Nations. Staff deliver results.

### **Children's and secondary dependants' allowances: review of the methodology**

In para. 104 (c) and (d) of its report, the Commission recommends to the General Assembly that the current levels of the children's and secondary dependant's allowances be maintained for the time being, and that the Commission keep the methodology to determine the allowances under consideration within the framework of the forthcoming review of the common system compensation package.

We wish to note here that UN staff members are hired to serve the United Nations all over the world, not only in their own countries but everywhere they may be needed. We can only fully deliver what is expected of us if we know that our families are taken care of fairly and that there is due recognition of the effects of an international work and family environment. Not all of us go back home after a mission, after what should have been an ordinary day of work – and therefore the work on this issue within the context of the common system compensation package, will be challenging and will require a full discussion with the opinions of all parties brought to the table.

### **Education grant special measures: Belgium and Morocco**

We are pleased that the Commission's recommendation in para. 113 is that, as from the academic year in progress on 1 January 2013, a special education grant measure be introduced for three English-curriculum schools in Brussels. We trust that the situation for Morocco will also be resolved as per the ICSC report.

### **Post adjustment matters: report of the Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions on its thirty-fifth session**

We have expressed concern, as well, about the deferral of consideration of other items mentioned in the Commission's report. Not long ago, an increase in the post adjustment in New York, calculated according to agreed methodology, was deferred - on the premise that the United Nations was facing a financial crisis; the ACABQ report later confirmed that there was no financial crisis in the United Nations. The final decision *de facto* froze the post adjustment in New York for six months. That was certainly not correct nor fair in CCISUA's and our more than 60,000 members' view. CCISUA greatly regrets the disruption of the regular procedures vis-à-vis the post adjustment system.

Regarding the other issues under this topic, and the plan to include them under the umbrella review of the compensation of the common system compensation package, we can only reiterate our concerns expressed earlier in this statement. All of these matters are very complex, of utmost concern to staff members, and in need of open and thorough discussion and technical examination before they are brought to the General Assembly for decision.

### **Survey of best prevailing conditions of employment (in Paris and Montreal)**

The International Civil Service Commission conducted the surveys of the best prevailing conditions of employment for Paris and Montreal and recommended the salary scales in paras.130 and 133, and annexes V and VI. These discussions and recommendations caused great consternation and hardship for staff members. CCISUA wishes to put on record our dissatisfaction with the outcome that is not in keeping with the Flemming principle and its intent to ensure proper remuneration for UN staff who do not have the same resources and opportunities of local staff who are not working for the UN.

### **Conditions of service in the field**

The Commission had no recommendations under this topic, but it is of such critical importance to CCISUA's members that include a very large number of field-based staff, that we wish to make a few observations.

Security is not a compensation for field-based staff members; it is an inherent necessity and a critical strategic element for agencies to manage their staff and in order to deliver program operations. We must keep this very basic concept in mind and ensure that there be a monitoring system to ensure best practices – not simply cost-savings. It is the responsibility of UN management to protect the lives of their staff.

### **Crisis in staff-management relations**

It would be hard to conclude without referring to the serious crisis in UN staff-management relations, directly affecting 13 CCISUA member organizations. The Secretary-General has unilaterally withdrawn the right of staff representatives to negotiate with management – a right that many of you take for granted in your own governments. That means, for example, that staff cannot negotiate on safety standards in the field at a time when record numbers are being killed by attacks; over 200 civilian colleagues have been killed in the last ten years. The fact that the withdrawal of negotiation rights took place one week before the devastating attack in Mogadishu only makes the restoration of labor rights more urgent. Contrary to what you may have been told, our staff unions are not asking to co-manage the organization, nor veto change; indeed they have not done so. They are, however, asking for due process and a right to negotiate on safety in the field, which goes well beyond being observers at the IASMN coordination meetings because our very lives are at stake.

## **Conclusion**

UN staff are much, much more than numbers in a budget; we are human beings who work very hard, and who make the choice to serve those less privileged, sacrifice other career possibilities, and forego comfortable family lives – and sometimes even make the ultimate sacrifice of their own lives. For that we ask your support and respect, including fair compensation for our services.

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me reiterate CCISUA's appreciation to you for listening to our concerns. I once more stress our conviction that supporting those who serve the world's needs not only will strengthen the high standards of integrity reflected in the diverse and talented United Nations workforce; it also will support them to carry out the difficult task put to them, and to achieve the objectives of their organizations and the Charter of the United Nations.

Thank you.