

Statement of the Chairman
Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

18 November 2014

Human resources management

(ACABQ report A/69/572)

Mr. Chairman,

The Advisory Committee has considered ten reports submitted by the Secretary-General on human resources management matters – namely: (a) The overview of human resources management reform: towards a global, dynamic and adaptable workforce for the United Nations (A/69/190) along with its four addenda (mobility, performance management, the young professionals programme and the assessment of the system of desirable ranges; (b) Composition of the Secretariat: staff demographics (A/69/292) and the addendum dealing with non-staff; (c) Practice of the Secretary-General in disciplinary matters and possible criminal behaviour (A/69/283); (d) Amendments to the Staff Rules (A/69/117) and (e) Activities of the Ethics Office (A/69/332). The Committee's observations and recommendations are contained in its report A/69/572 which you have before you today.

Mr. Chairman,

In view of the large amount of material before you in these reports, I will not give an exhaustive account of the Committee's observations and recommendations, but rather highlight a number of issues, which in the view of the Committee, are particularly important.

First, concerning the current composition of the Secretariat, the Committee continues to express its view that the data would benefit for greater trend analysis and the possible reasons behind certain trends. While supporting Secretary-General's proposal to change in the reporting cycle and the cut-off date, the Committee stresses that these two changes will not themselves improve the analytical quality of the report.

Of particular note is the growth in senior-level appointments, where there has been significant growth in the number of high-level positions since 2009, despite a decrease in the overall number of staff over this time. For the majority of United Nations system entities, the trend is in the opposite direction.

On the question of identifying suitable candidates from unrepresented and underrepresented countries, the Committee reiterates its recommendation that a comprehensive strategy is needed as well as an analysis of the effectiveness of the different outreach activities conducted to date.

Similarly, with respect to the representation of women in the Secretariat particularly at senior levels, the Committee considers that the progress made is unsatisfactory and much too slow. It recommends that the Secretary-General be requested to undertake intensified and targeted outreach efforts in this regard.

Mr. Chairman,

Turning now to the matter of the mobility framework as approved by the General Assembly earlier this year, the Advisory Committee recognizes that a significant amount of preparatory work is needed on different aspects, much of which is ongoing, prior to the implementation of the first phase, which will begin in 2016. In particular, the Committee stresses the importance of establishing the criteria for determining a viable comparative baseline against which future mobility trends can be measured. The Committee also reaffirms the need for complete and accurate cost data to be included in future reports of the Secretary-General and reiterates its belief that any efforts to encourage internal mobility should not have a negative impact on efforts to engage fresh talent from outside. Moreover, criteria to be applied by the Special Constraints Panel in determining possible exemptions from mobility requirements need to be clearly defined and set out in relevant Administrative Instructions prior to implementation.

The third area I wish to highlight relates to the issue of performance management – a matter which is, in the view of the Committee, fundamental for the fair treatment of staff, for rewarding high-performance and addressing under-performance and for the effective delivery of mandates. In response to requests of the General Assembly which had emphasized the importance of a thorough reform of the current performance management system, the Secretary-General puts forward a number of measures, which do not aim to overhaul the entire structure, but, in his view, target change in some critical areas. The Committee has no objection to the proposed amendments and, in particular, supports all efforts to ensure greater consistency in performance ratings.

A fourth area of focus is the Young Professionals Programme, which has also been the subject of a General-Assembly mandated comprehensive review. The Advisory Committee expresses its regret that recent reductions in staffing levels have led to fewer opportunities for junior professionals which in turn reduces the effectiveness of the YPP tool. The Committee recommends therefore that the General Assembly broaden the pool of available posts to include P-2 positions funded from general temporary assistance for more than one year and consider further possibilities of broadening the pool. Reservations are also expressed concerning the replacement of the general examination paper with a certification requirement for language proficiency along with the introduction of proposed new testing techniques.

Concerning the system of desirable ranges, which as you know, measures progress towards achieving a wide equitable geographical distribution of staff within the Secretariat, the General Assembly has on various occasions requested the Secretary-General to undertake a comprehensive review of the system with a view to putting in place a more effective tool. In his report, the Secretary-General states his view that the current system has served well in practice and indicates his readiness to provide scenarios if requested. He also proposes some arithmetic adjustments to the determination of the lower and upper limits of the desirable ranges, by updating the base figures and the number of Member States. The Advisory Committee believes that the latest report of the Secretary-General does not respond adequately to the request for a comprehensive review, since the Secretary-General does not put forward any new elements to improve the effectiveness of the existing system. At this stage, therefore, it does not see the merit in making minor changes to the calculations, in the absence of the requested comprehensive review.

Finally, as regards the implementation of various other human resources reforms, the detail of which is contained in the Secretary-General's overview report, the Committee regrets that more information was not provided concerning the development of a workforce planning system which, in its view, is essential in order to optimize staff placement decisions. Moreover, concerning the system of staff selection and recruitment now in place since 2010, the Committee notes with concern that average selection times now exceed current targets by approximately 50 per cent. On the very specific matter concerning permanent resident status, the Committee, in responding to the Secretary-General's proposal for the a review of the long standing policy, recommends that the General Assembly reconsider the requirement for staff members to renounce permanent resident status in a country other than the country of their nationality.

Mr. Chairman,

Before concluding, I wish to point out that the Advisory Committee in its report also provides comments on the activities of the Ethics Office for the period from 1 August 2013 to 31 July 2014. In noting the 15 per cent increase in the number of requests received by that Office over the reporting period, the Committee recommends that additional efforts be undertaken to clarify the correct reporting and advisory mechanisms related to cases of alleged wrongdoing. The Committee also recommends that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to finalize his consultations concerning post-employment restrictions and without further delay.

Thank you.