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## FIFTH COMMITTEE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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### Agenda Item 147 – Joint Inspection Unit

### “Review of Staff Exchange and Similar Inter-agency mobility measures in United Nations system organizations”

(A/75/85 - JIU/REP/2019/8)

### STATEMENT BY INSPECTOR JEREMIAH KRAMER

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Chairperson, representative of the Chief Executive Board Secretariat, distinguished delegates.

It is an honour to introduce on behalf of the JIU this review of inter-agency mobility<sup>1</sup> measures in United Nations system organizations. The ability of organizations to enable the movement of staff in and out of UN system organizations and beyond – both to meet business needs and to respond to the aspirations of staff – is more important than ever.

The main message of this report is that current approaches do not respond to contemporary needs. This results from limited organizational commitment, disconnection from the strategic preoccupations of organizations, the siloed and inward nature of staff assessment and selection in UN organizations, and the misalignment of some institutional incentives that fail to facilitate personnel flows within the UN system and beyond.

The idea of inter-agency mobility has been deeply embedded almost from the inception of the United Nations system. It has been described as one of three pillars of the common system -- joining the common salary scale and the pension fund -- as key methods to facilitate the interchange of personnel among organizations. The year 1949 saw development of the first version of the *Inter-Organization Agreement concerning Transfer, Secondment or Loan of Staff among the Organizations applying the United Nations Common System of Salaries and Allowance*, which was revised in 1963, 2003, 2005 and 2012.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition: For this review, inter-agency mobility relates to those movements of staff from one organization to another carried out under the Inter-Organization Agreement concerning Transfer, Secondment or Loan of Staff among the Organizations applying the United Nations Common System of Salaries and Allowance. That embraces three types of movement: transfer, meaning the staff member goes and no return rights to the releasing organization; secondment, the movement of a staff member from one organization to another for a fixed period, normally not exceeding two years, during which the staff member will normally be paid by and be subject to the staff regulations and rules of the receiving organization; Loan is the movement of a staff member from one organization to another for a limited period, normally not exceeding one year, during which the staff member will be subject to the administrative supervision of the receiving organization but will continue to be subject to the staff regulations and rules of the releasing organization. Loan can be reimbursable or not. Not all movements are carried out under this framework.

Statements at the time emphasize three purposes: improved functioning as a United Nations system, with shared values and common culture, in response to global challenges; more efficient talent acquisition, development and management; and enabling staff to pursue professional development, while accommodating personal considerations.

Work on successive iterations of the Agreement has been supplemented by periodic examinations of inter-agency mobility by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB), and the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU). The main story lines emerging from these reviews were consistent: inter-agency mobility was limited; it was staff-driven with little evident organizational interest; barriers were well known, but generally not acted upon.

Successive human resources management frameworks promulgated by the ICSC (2000, 2010, 2017) also emphasized inter-agency mobility.

JIU decided to have a fresh look at the issue due to changes in the broader United Nations system context.

The JIU review 10 years ago observed that organizations administer interagency mobility, but do not *manage* it. At about the same time, the ICSC pointed to the disconnect between statements of overall support and actual actions taken by organizations. In these respects, not much has changed.

Neither the initial Agreement nor its subsequent revisions encourage inter-agency mobility. What exists is a set of administrative arrangements that specify how certain transactions can be carried out.

We found that the incidence of inter-agency mobility is still low, but how much there is, is hard to know as data are not published.

Inter-agency mobility is overwhelmingly staff driven—the result of staff successfully applying for jobs in other organizations. It is rarely integrated into human resources strategies related to talent management, workforce planning, and career development. Neither is it always clear how inter-agency mobility experience is factored into internal human resources policies, such as eligibility for contract types, promotion, and internal mobility.

There are many barriers. Some are well known, such as the non-recognition by some organizations of certain contract types, the non-recognition of promotions gained on secondment, and the preference accorded by some organizations to internal candidates. Perhaps more important is how siloed organizations are when it comes to staffing. Shared talent pools that provide a basis for selection are rare, even though organizations carry out recruitment and selection processes for similar functions, and sometimes compete for the same talent. Even initiatives aimed at more common selection of nationally recruited staff are difficult to move forward.

At the same time, there is real demand for staff exchanges among subsets of organizations that share thematic interests that should be acted upon. Exchanges with non-UN actors are very uncommon, although organizations like UNDP and UNICEF see programmatic value in them, as well as professional development for their staff.

Attention needs to be given both to operational issues (including clarification of the practices of the UN Secretariat so as to ensure that general service staff are no longer disadvantaged) related to the Agreement, as well as to how inter-agency mobility can better support the strategic objectives of organizations.

To address the need for clarification, the Secretary-General is urged to publish an administrative issuance that makes clear that all categories of staff on fixed-term and appointments of unlimited duration are eligible

to benefit from the provisions of the 2012 Agreement and that it would apply to general service and similar categories of nationally recruited staff, irrespective of the duty station of the new function.

At a system level, CEB mechanisms have not delivered on intended inter-agency mobility actions. None of the barriers identified in reviews carried out in 2003 and 2010 were resolved; the stated need in the context of ‘Delivering as One’ to make inter-agency mobility a reality remained hortatory; the measures suggested by inter-agency working groups on inter-agency mobility in 2013 and 2014 were not acted upon; the intention to confer internal candidate status on United Nations system staff, which was part of the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) strategic plan for 2013-16 was not realized; the intention to pilot inter-agency mobility in the human resources functional area was not pursued.

This history can reasonably throw into question the priority attached to inter-agency mobility. This one of the reasons we recommend that organizations rearticulate the business case.

We can discern elements of a modern requirement for inter-agency mobility in the strategic context we see today. This includes the need to:

- deliver on the 2030 Agenda, including the commitment to work for shared results;
- reposition the development system, which involves extensive inter-agency mobility;
- work in deeper partnership with non-United Nations actors;
- keep an eye on changing financing arrangements which often involve the projectization and earmarking of funding for specified time periods;
- engage in workforce transformation and the evolving response to the changing world of work.

Through a combination of soft and formal recommendations, the report suggests measures to reduce the fragmentation in the management of business needs in the human resources area. One them is to develop a common system-wide approach to recruiting young professionals, which aligns with variants of this suggestion made by the ICSC. Establishing a common pool that can be managed to provide for inter-agency experience as part of a development phase could accomplish multiple purposes, while strengthening the United Nations brand — as distinct from agency profiles — as an employer. Such an approach is not incompatible with organizations making specific appointments in line with legislative requirements, such as for geographic representation.

Other recommended measures include developing common talent pools, applying in earnest the new UN system leadership framework, and treating UN system candidates as if they were internal.

Altogether, the report makes 10 formal and 32 soft recommendations—those are text highlighted in bold.

So, what should the General Assembly do?

The first thing is to devote more attention to issues related to greater permeability in the UN system, including inter-agency mobility. This is not easy because, as a cross-organizational issue, inter-agency mobility has rarely been subject to inter-governmental oversight. As a result, member states and legislative bodies have had very limited visibility of it.

As a step to overcoming this gap, we recommend that the General Assembly request the ICSC periodically, but regularly, to examine the status of inter-agency mobility. In its role as legislator for the common system, the General Assembly is uniquely positioned to enhance visibility and transparency on this body of work.

This would be appropriate, partly in view of the limitation on what the CEB mechanisms have actually accomplished, but more fundamentally because inter-agency mobility is a strategic issue -- not merely an administrative one -- that requires attention at the inter-governmental level.

While, as can be seen in the CEB comments on this recommendation, some organizations would prefer to contain the discussion to the Human Resources Network, we emphasize that our recommendation to draw on the horizontal and advisory role of the ICSC, and the expertise of the ICSC secretariat, would broaden the circle because leaving it only to the CEB mechanisms has not delivered a lot.

From a system point of view, we also urge the General Assembly to support our recommendation 1 on the collection of relevant data. This recommendation is directed at the Secretary-General and is modelled on one the JIU made 10 years ago, and which the organizations had appeared to accept.

Despite the CEB comments to the effect that the annual collection by CEB of data on personnel statistics already comprises a range of pertinent data, we point out that the 140-odd pages of HR data published on the CEB website do not include even a single data point about inter-agency mobility. The recent emphasis in CEB mechanisms on a more agile, integrated and mobile workforce to support the 2030 agenda and to respond to the evolving future of work would link this body of work to inter-agency mobility.

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to respond to questions.