

STAFF UNION BULLETIN BULLETIN DU SYNDICAT BOLETIN DEL SINDICATO



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ILO STAFF UNION COMMENTS ON ICSC APPROACH TO A REVIEW OF THE PAY AND BENEFITS SYSTEM

(Annex to a letter addressed to the Chairman of the ICSC on 29 June 2004)

1. At its 52nd Session (July/August 2000), the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) decided, within the framework for human resources management it had just adopted, to review the pay and benefits system on a priority basis. As indicated in para.14 of the Report of the ICSC for the year 2001, the framework was “conceived as a management tool to enable organizations to manage their resources in a strategic manner and reinforce their capacity for carrying out overall management reform”.
2. Article 10(a) of the ICSC Statute establishes that the Commission “shall make recommendations to the General Assembly on the broad principles for the determination of the conditions of service of the staff (...)”. Article 11(a) specifies that “The Commission shall establish the methods by which the principles for determining conditions of service should be applied (...)”, while Article 14 indicates that “The Commission shall make recommendations to the organizations on: (a) Standards of recruitment; (b) The development of recruitment sources, including the establishment of central rosters of qualified candidates, particularly at junior entrance levels; (c) The organization of competitive examinations or alternative selection procedures; (d) Career development, staff training programmes, including inter-organizations programmes, and evaluation of staff.”
3. Since 2001, the ICSC’s work on the so-called “Review of the Pay and Benefits System” has evolved in a way that confirms the worst apprehensions of the ILO Staff Union Committee when it was first apprised of the variety of issues at stake - and realized that, under the guise of a “review”, what was fundamentally under way was a major and comprehensive attempt to put into jeopardy most if not all of the principles governing employment in the international civil service: independence and protection against arbitrariness, employment security, career

development, prevalence of the rule of law, equality of treatment, determination of salaries on the basis of grades, progression on the basis of seniority and established competencies, access to guaranteed social protection, right of appeal, etc.

4. Documents prepared for the 58th and 59th Sessions of the ICSC show in particular the deliberate intention of the ICSC Secretariat to pursue a line that could be summarized as “privatization of the international civil service”, a clearer expression than the one used by the ICSC’s so-called Open-Ended Working Group of the Whole according to which “differences between the public and private sector were no longer as marked as in the past and market concepts were increasingly permeating both national administrations and international organizations. Thus, for reform to succeed, a global vision that met the business needs of organizations and the expectations of members States in governing bodies was required.”
5. Since much of the work conducted by the ICSC may be nearing completion at least at the conceptual level, and some approaches are being tested in a few programmes or organizations, and while there is no evidence that, in the name of the “common system”, some of the unacceptable and even absurd proposals already tabled may not finally be imposed on the ILO - albeit against the will of the Director General and of the Governing Body - the ILO Staff Union decided to make its position known to the Commission on some key elements of the “Review” as a whole.
6. This communication is submitted pursuant to Rule of Procedure 36 of the ICSC, and is formally linked to item 4 of the Annotated Agenda for the 59th Session of the Commission. Its contents were shared with the Director General of the ILO and his representative on the Human Resources Network, with the co-chairs of the ILO Joint Negotiating Committee as well as with Staff Associations/Unions across the United Nations system, with Participants’ Representatives on the UNJSPF as well as with the CEO of the UNJSPF. Its substance will also be communicated to the members of the ILO Governing Body by the Chair of the ILO Staff Union Committee.
7. The ILO Staff Union is of the opinion that erecting more artificial barriers between the different categories of staff - notably between those locally and internationally recruited - not only goes against the interests of the staff, but also runs counter to the interests of the organizations themselves, at least those, like the ILO, where promoting the unified character of the international civil service represents an explicit goal of human resources management.
8. The ILO Staff Union therefore contends that priority and urgent consideration should be given to:
 - i) the introduction of one single grade structure in the UN - from cleaner to Secretary General - which would correspond to the approach retained by the comparator and the practice existing in non-UN international

- ii) organizations like the World Bank; and
- ii) the entitlement of all staff members, irrespective of their country of origin and duty station, to those fringe benefits aiming at ensuring decent and equal access to essential services such as education for their children, security of goods and persons, health care, housing, etc.

9. The ILO Staff Union therefore requests that the following items be included in the review:

- *Feasibility study for introducing a unique grade structure - e.g. from G.1 to G.15 across the UN;*
- *Cost implications of an alternative scheme to subsidize for all staff access to decent education for their children, in conditions where suitable free or quasi-free educational facilities in national culture are not readily available at the duty station;*
- *Feasibility of designing and implementing across the UN a scheme allowing all staff to access low-cost credit schemes, notably for housing purposes;*
- *Eliminating discrimination on the basis of place of recruitment for accessing health insurance, or for benefiting from personal security measures of protection against civil and war hazards.*

10. The ILO Staff Union further contends that proper and fair grading is of paramount importance in any civil service, and that loyalty to public interests can be ensured only when civil servants enjoy employment conditions protecting them from any outside interference putting their security and independence into jeopardy.

11. The ILO Staff Union therefore requests:

- *That the principle according to which all international civil servants are assigned jobs which are classified in categories and grades, in accordance with the duties and responsibilities attaching to them, be solemnly reaffirmed on the occasion of the review;*
- *That the ICSC encourage organizations to adopt schemes resulting in the granting of without-limit-of-time contracts after a reasonably long - e.g. five years - probationary period, for all those international civil servants occupied in duties of a recurring nature mainstreamed in the Organizations' activities, since the principle of renewable - and hence of possibly non-renewed - contracts brings in elements affecting the independence of international civil servants likely to lose their jobs if they do not please those with the power either to retain them in employment, or to provide them with employment after the end of a contractual relation with the UN;*

- *That salaries remain in essence linked only to the grade corresponding to the duties and responsibilities assigned to individual officials, and that mechanisms be designed permitting constant progression over time of the real value of this essential part of the remuneration package;*
 - *That any reform in the pay and benefits system be designed in such a way that it does not affect the proper functioning of the UNJSPF, as a comprehensive, benefits-defined pension scheme based on all elements of remuneration, similar in that sense to what applies in the overwhelming majority of national civil services.*
12. Moves such as those considered by the ICSC are in blatant contradiction with article 101.3 of the Charter of the United Nations, which establishes that “the paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity.”
 13. Further, with their disruptive effects on solidly established employment conditions for civil servants, which indeed constitute the core elements around which “great traditions of public administration have grown up in member States: competence, integrity, impartiality, independence and discretion” (Code of Conduct, para.2), the set of proposals submitted by the ICSC is akin to a negation of the mandate and the legitimacy of those many UN organizations which, like the ILO, are value-based organizations, not business-oriented structures, NGOs or semi-private enterprises.
 14. The ILO is the only organization in the UN system where relations between staff and the administration representatives are explicitly and systematically based on collective bargaining. The ILO Staff Union is therefore convinced that, together with the ILO Administration, it will find internally the ways and means to avoid exposing its staff - and the Organization - to the devastating effects of the ICSC compendium of proposals if these were to be finally confirmed, approved or sustained by the UN General Assembly.
 15. The ILO Staff Union nonetheless sees too many dangers in this set of principles to remain silent, and hereby informs the ICSC that it firmly and globally opposes the basis on which the Review of the Pay and Benefits System is being conducted, and will continue to oppose it via the various means of action at its disposal - including adequately informing all staff of what is really at stake.