



Thursday, 22 February 2018

Dear Executive Heads,

It is with regret that we announce that staff have lost confidence in the independence and technical competency of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), following a series of major failings.

These include the substantial deterioration in the employment conditions of UN staff around the world, caused by the ICSC's findings, recommendations and decisions, such as (i) negative changes to compensation packages equivalent to the loss of up to one month's salary for affected staff; (ii) pay cuts in the face of rising costs of living at a number of duty stations and peacekeeping missions; (iii) unrealistic reclassification of hardship in the most challenging operational environments; (iv) unrealistic classification of family duty stations; (v) volatile levels of post adjustment in the field; (vi) a lack of adequate protection against inflation and currency devaluation for local and international staff in the field; (vii) an unwillingness to provide the same danger pay to locally-recruited staff as to international staff; and others.

We believe this is the result of the ICSC's outdated governance model and working methods. Of particular concern is its lack of transparency and accountability. The ICSC does not allow systematic access to data and there is no mechanism to review or appeal its findings.

This led most recently to the discovery of significant errors and methodological flaws in the headquarters cost-of-living surveys (and we may assume that similar errors remain uncovered in cost-of-living surveys for the field) to the extent that the CEB HR Network of UN common system organizations stated that a clear legal risk would arise from implementing the results. It is regrettable that the ICSC has refused to recognize this issue. Further the ICSC has since reneged on its commitments made to organizations and staff with regards to the application of those results.

We also note the many questions, left unanswered, that have arisen surrounding the application of the methodology for the local salary surveys in Bangkok, New York, Tokyo and New Delhi among others, leading to unjustified, unfair and hard to manage secondary and tertiary salary scales.

Taken together this has not only led to the loss of confidence in the independence and technical competency of the ICSC by the thousands of UN staff whose incomes have been negatively impacted, but has led staff to conclude that the ICSC is motivated solely by an austerity agenda driven by certain member states, in contrast with the provisions of its statute that "its members shall perform their functions in full independence and with impartiality".

Further, the reputation of the UN as a leading employer that treats its staff with respect and fairness has been tarnished. If no urgent action is taken to get the ICSC back in line with its technical mandate and core UN principles of accountability and transparency, the UN may suffer irreparable harm as the matter is gaining attention and global protest is gathering speed. We note that the cost of defending the UN system against mounting appeals and protests may soon outweigh the immediate financial benefits that the ICSC's findings may generate in the short term. To this end we note that the UN Dispute Tribunal recent ruled both that pay cuts may be illegal and that it has jurisdiction in this area.

We therefore seek your support to get the ICSC back in line with its technical mandate and restore its transparency and credibility. To this end, we recall that the statutes of the ICSC derive from a draft submitted to the General Assembly in 1974 by your predecessors, through the CEB's precursor, the Administrative Committee on Coordination. To this end, we believe it is essential to conduct an urgent review of the ICSC's governance structure, regulations and rules with a view to creating an accountable body that follows a transparent, balanced and fair process and methods.

While this review is ongoing, the Staff Federations call on you to take the following intermediate steps:

- 1) Temporarily suspend cooperation with the ICSC in relation to cost-of-living and local salary surveys;
- 2) Temporarily withhold financial contributions to the ICSC;
- 3) Defer implementation of all decisions made by ICSC since 2016 relating to pay surveys. More specifically, uphold the recommendations of UN Human Resources Network made in relation to the 2016 cost-of-living survey.

We also call on you to defer the implementation of proposed pay cuts while identified errors remain uncorrected and not to implement secondary and tertiary pay scales, starting with Bangkok and Tokyo.

The staff federations are resolved to use all available means to continue this campaign, including staff meetings, demonstrations, work stoppages, legal appeals and other labour actions which may be decided later. This will start with a first global day of action this Tuesday 27 February and be followed by others, coming on the heel of collective actions and legal appeals that are already taking place in Geneva, Bangkok and other duty stations.

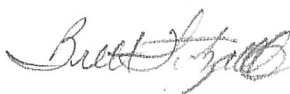
We recognise that the HR Network has consistently emphasised its duty of care to staff and its managerial responsibility to implement decisions based on evidence. We also value the constructive dialogue that has been maintained between Executive Heads and the staff federations. We trust that this will continue and that we can find genuine solutions that benefit both the UN and its staff.

Yours sincerely,



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President

Coordinating Committee of  
International Staff Unions and  
Associations (CCISUA)



Brett Fitzgerald  
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Civil Servants' Associations  
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To:  
Executive Heads of UN common system organizations

Cc:  
H.E. Miroslav Lajčák  
President of the United Nations General Assembly