

A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

UNITED NATIONS STAFF UNION

Dear Colleagues,

The Assistant Secretary-General, Office of Human Resources Management, hosted a town hall meeting on 30 November 2009 where she addressed the staff on upcoming changes to the staff selection system. We have received, already, a draft amendment to ST/AI/2006/3 to reflect the new mobility requirements for promotion to P-5 and higher levels.

The Staff Union is fully seized with this particular matter, among others, and is opposed to the implementation of the mobility scheme by means of the staff selection system. If the mobility requirement for eligibility for promotion is implemented in the form that is proposed in the draft amendment to ST/AI/2006/3, it will be costly to both the staff and the Organization in monetary and other immeasurable ways. Such promotion requirement cannot be imposed without a mobility policy that sets out the objectives and purposes of mobility, the safeguards to be provided to staff, the procedures to be followed, the frameworks that support mobility and appropriate incentives.

One of the imminent changes will be a litmus test for eligibility for promotion to the P-5 level and above. The new measure will tie the eligibility for promotion to the P-5 level and above with prior mobility and service in non-headquarters duty stations. The rationale for the changes is two-fold. The first is that the United Nations has evolved over the past 60 years from a conference services and headquarters-focused organization to an increasingly operational field based organization, with more than half of the staff serving in field duty stations around the world. Secondly, the Secretary-General believes that the political and administrative complexity of operating in the field requires that senior level managers must have first hand knowledge of field operations.

These changes were reportedly "negotiated" with the staff representatives and agreed to at the June 2009 thirtieth session of the Staff-Management Coordination Committee (SMCC-XXX) meeting and are planned to be implemented on 1 January

2010. Except that, according to paragraph 34 of the report of SMCC-XXX, it "was agreed that the inter-sessional SMCC working group on mobility should continue its work and report back to SMCC-XXXI with a view to the submission a proposed mobility policy to 31st session of the SMCC in 2010 and the sixty-fifth session of the General Assembly in the fall of 2010. It was further agreed that management and staff, respectively, **would nominate their members of the working group** [emphasis added] by the end of the session, on the understanding that the working group would resume by September 2009, with periodic reporting back to the SMCC plenary on its progress." There are two oddities here. The first is that it appears that the working group was already operational without members. The second is that even as the SMCC decided to await the outcome of its working group on mobility, it agreed to implement the policy, anyway, by tying it to the eligibility for promotion.

The argument that the Secretariat is now a field-based organ seems plausible; in reality, it is not. It ignores the distinction between the United Nations and its organs as provided for in the United Nations Charter. It blurs the distinction between the Secretariat and the field operations which are subsidiary bodies of the Security Council but are serviced by two Secretariat departments. It does not take into account the specialized occupational groups in the Secretariat that do not exist in field operations. Consequently, the proposed changes disproportionately elevate two out of 15 functions of the Secretariat (see ST/SGB/1997/5).

It would be inefficient to expose every potential senior level personnel to field operations when such experience will only be relevant to two functions and four out of 23 organizational units of the Secretariat. It would be disingenuous to require that a staff member serves in a field mission before he or she is eligible for promotion to a P-5 post and above. Already, few staff are given the opportunity to ascend to those levels; a large proportion of staff at the P-5 and above levels is recruited from external sources. This requirement will give external candidates an advantage over internal staff, contrary to the Staff Regulations.

The new mobility requirement, which will be promulgated via an administrative issuance, is clearly hostile to staff at the Headquarters in New York which, not surprisingly, has the majority of posts funded from the regular budget. It is being driven by the needs of field operations. The requirement masks the cumulated anomalies in the separate recruitment practices of the field missions and attempts to launder and integrate staff who have been recruited without a review and vetting by a central review body. The Secretariat is being re-defined to include other bodies that are not part of it such as ICTY and ICTR.

Since 1 July 2009, such staff are now considered as internal candidates, in contravention of the General Assembly (GA) resolution 63/250. It ignores the fact that while peacekeeping and the attendant field operations are a continuing need, missions have finite mandates and ephemeral posts without a guarantee of continued employment. It does not recognize that mobility applies to some staff and not others, and that language requirements could impede mobility to some duty stations.

Although it is cloaked as an incentive, the proposed mobility requirement for eligibility for promotion is coercion by other means. It is discriminatory of staff at peaking points in their careers. It is a requirement that is not family-friendly and which will make the United Nations even less attractive especially to female candidates who remain few at the higher echelons of the Secretariat and the Organization. It is a radical departure from the current staff selection, placement and promotion policies. It blankets all staff, including those at the P-3 level and below who have already fulfilled the current requirement of two lateral moves, even as it exempts the current staff at D-1 and D-2 levels who have never served in field missions and other duty stations.

The mobility requirement is a brazen disregard for GA resolutions 63/250, 61/244 and others. In resolution 63/250, the GA requested the Secretary-General "to submit proposals aimed at encouraging **voluntary mobility** of staff in the context of the review of the mobility policy, without prejudice to the different needs of duty stations and the field." The GA also noted "the intention of the Secretary-

General as set out in his report [A/63/208] to suspend the managed mobility programmes upon completion of the D-1/D-2 exercise, in order for a review to be undertaken, including on the maximum period of occupancy of post and lessons learned, with a view to developing proposals on the mobility policy, taking into account recommendations of the Task Force on Human Resources Management, in consultation with all relevant stakeholders, including staff associations, and requests him to report thereon to the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session in the context of his report on human resources management, with an analysis of cost and benefits, bearing in mind paragraph 46 of the report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions." In paragraph 46 of its report, A/63/526, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions requested the Secretary-General, within the framework of the review, **to respond fully** to the requests of the General Assembly contained in resolution 61/244 and other relevant resolutions. The Secretary-General is yet to fully respond but is moving ahead to implement a mobility scheme beforehand.

Mobility should be separate from staff selection and placement for obvious reasons, not least of which are the GA resolutions that have repeatedly indicated that **mobility should be voluntary**. The Secretary-General should submit proposals requested of him in the respective GA resolutions. Besides, the impact of the harmonization of conditions of service is yet to be determined.

The Staff Union will seek a legal opinion regarding the implications of the proposed mobility requirement with a view to redress, through the United Nations Dispute Tribunal, the potential and implied effects on the working conditions of the staff. We have noted, with interest, the "petition from the staff on mobility" initiated by the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council and addressed to the Secretary-General.



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