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To: Chairs, Member Associations/Unions  
Members of the Executive Committee  
Chairs, Members with Associate Status  
Chairs, Associations with Consultative Status  
Presidents, Federations with Observer Status  
Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Standing Committees

From: Gemma Vestal, General Secretary

**REPORT BY THE FEDERATION OF INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVANTS' ASSOCIATIONS (FICSA)  
ON THE 86<sup>TH</sup> SESSION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION (ICSC)  
(United Nations, New York, 19 to 29 March 2018)**

*Submitted by Brett Fitzgerald (President),  
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1. The 86<sup>th</sup> session of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) met for its spring session at the United Nations in New York from 19 through 29 March 2018, where the main agenda items included: review of pensionable remuneration; hardship allowance-classification methodology; family duty stations with hardship classifications D or E; post adjustment issues; identification of the highest-paid national civil service and update on diversity/gender in respect of the framework for human resources management.

2. FICSA's interventions on each of the above-listed agenda items are reproduced in the annex. However, please refer to document FICSA/CIRC/1285 for a copy of the Federation's opening statement. Background information and the subsequent ICSC decisions related thereto are indicated immediately below under the corresponding heading.

**Review of pensionable remuneration: working group report**

3. The report of the ICSC working group on the review of pensionable remuneration, which had met from 29 January through 2 February 2018 in Madrid, was presented to the Commission. During this 86<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission, its main decisions in respect of the upcoming comparability study of the pension schemes of the United States and the United Nations were as follows: application of the single rates of the common scale of staff assessment to the net remuneration of staff in the Professional and higher categories, without the inclusion of the spouse allowance; retention of the current grossing-up factors for both categories of staff; retention of the reference to major headquarters locations for the purposes of tax systems referenced for the calculation of the common scale of staff assessment; the introduction of an additional bracket to the single rates of the common scale of staff assessment and adjustment of the single rates of the common scale of staff assessment. The Commission also decided: To maintain the reference to the top step of the D-2 level of the unified salary scale and revise the

parameters of the formula to minimize any intended increase in the levels of pensionable remuneration of ungraded officials; and to protect the current levels of pensionable remuneration for any staff members who would otherwise have a lower level of pensionable remuneration following the revision.

4. It is foreseen that the July 2018 session (87<sup>th</sup> session) of the Commission will examine the comparability study described above and will review the financial and actuarial implementations when adopting its final recommendations on pensionable remuneration.

#### **Framework for human resources: update on diversity/gender**

5. Following up on the framework for human resources management as adopted by the Commission in 2000, it reviewed at its 85<sup>th</sup> session in 2017 a report containing information on all aspects of diversity including gender parity, geographical distribution, multi-culturalism, generational diversity and multilingualism. At the same time, the Commission called for a better appreciation for the broader concept of diversity, using the human resources management framework. Therefore, the ICSC secretariat presented to this 86<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission a component on workforce diversity to be added to the framework and which was subsequently revised at the current session.

#### **Post adjustment issues: report of Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions (ACPAQ)**

6. Discussions relative to the 2016 round of cost-of-living surveys for purposes of establishing post adjustment indices took place under this agenda item and, to a lesser extent, under the agenda items related to the opening of the 86<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission as well as resolutions and decisions adopted by the UN General Assembly at its 72<sup>nd</sup> session.

7. The Commission basically refused to reopen discussions regarding the 2016 round of surveys and insisted that the 64 recommendations contained in the report of the ICSC consultant on the review of the post adjustment index methodology, as submitted to the 40<sup>th</sup> session of ACPAQ (26 February to 5 March 2018), should not be seen as corrections of flaws or errors in the methodology or its application during the 2016 round but should be viewed as potential improvements to the methodology in preparation for the next round of surveys which will take place in approximately five years from now.

8. The staff federations argued that the ICSC consultant had not declared the methodology used during the 2016 round of surveys as being 'fit for purpose' and that the 64 recommendations emanating from the consultant's findings and report were evidence on their own that the post adjustment system had flaws and shortcomings as specified in detail by the senior statisticians on behalf of the HR Network and as evidenced by the ICSC secretariat's unexpected findings while using the European Comparison Programme (ECP) data. This subsequently required the conduct of an ICSC survey in order to determine, for Brussels, a survey transition factor which the ICSC secretariat then extended to all European headquarters duty stations for which ECP data had been used.

9. Despite all the arguments put forward by FICSA as contained in the annex to the present report, the Commission did not accept to review its earlier decisions relative the 2016 surveys.

10. In this respect, the authors of this report who participated in the Commission's discussions of this agenda item found that the references to 'strikes' and threats of strikes during the meeting of the Commission proved counterproductive, only causing some members of the Commission to become further entrenched in their positions.

11. Nonetheless, we were able to obtain that the use of ECP data be paused for the current round of surveys in those duty stations where the surveys have not yet been conducted.

12. Moreover, the Commission agreed to fully and comprehensively review the post adjustment index methodology and operational rules; a review which will begin immediately in regard to the issues of highest priority and which will include representatives of staff and organizations. In this respect, the FICSA representative was already invited to an informal meeting with the ICSC secretariat the previous week to initiate discussions on the scope of the review as well as its timeline. A project management plan for the comprehensive review is to be prepared and presented to the summer/July 2018 session of the Commission.

#### **Identification of the highest-paid national civil service (Noblemaire study): phase I**

13. It is recalled that "since the organizations must be able to recruit and retain staff from all the Member States, the level of remuneration must be sufficient to attract those from the countries where salary levels are highest". This principle (known as Noblemaire) is periodically reviewed, approximately every five years, by the Commission in line with its mandate from the UN General Assembly.

14. The Federal Civil Service of the United States of America has always served as the comparator civil service for this purpose.

15. Back in 1991 the UN General Assembly, at the recommendation of the Commission, endorsed a two-phase methodology for purposes of conducting the Noblemaire study. With phase I of the study having been completed, the ICSC secretariat provided the results of that analysis to the 86<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission.

16. Following numerous questions relative to the phase I analysis and subsequent responses, the Commission decided that it was not necessary to proceed to phase II but that it should revert to the issue of a reference check with other international organizations following the receipt of the findings of the 2019 benchmarking studies among several international/regional organizations, including the World Bank Group, Coordinated organizations and the European Union because, during the last reference check done in 2006, it had been found that cash remuneration provided by the World Bank and OECD was 28.6 and 28.8 per cent higher, respectively.

#### **Hardship allowance: classification methodology – impact of the revision of the criteria for overall categorization**

17. It is recalled that in 2017 the Commission had approved adjustments to the criteria for the overall hardship classification in line with the model 2 which had been proposed. At the same

time, it had requested its secretariat (and the working group) to apply the revised methodology when carrying out the subsequent hardship review in November 2017 (which focused on the African region) and then to inform the Commission of the impact.

18. At this 86<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission, the secretariat reported, on behalf of the working group, that all hardship factors, except for climate, were now considered equally important; security was no longer the single most important factor and that the working group now found it easier to understand and explain the rationale behind the overall classification. Work with the Medical Services Division would continue with the aim of improving the evaluation of the health factor and the alignment with health risk assessment methodology for improved health ratings. Updating the hardship questionnaire was foreseen, including the development of an electronic format.

### **Family duty stations with hardship classifications of D or E**

19. At the previous session (85<sup>th</sup>) of the Commission, the field-based organizations of the Human Resources Network (HRN) had raised the issue of duty stations that had a hardship classification of D or E due to the absence of adequate housing, health facilities and high levels of isolation. As such hardship conditions and absence of facilities could prevent internationally recruited staff from bringing their family member to the duty stations, the field-based organizations had requested, during the review of the hardship classification methodology, some flexibility in respect of staff members assigned to such difficult duty stations, albeit designated as family duty stations. At its 85<sup>th</sup> session the Commission had discussed whether the organizations could offer the option to staff members assigned to difficult duty stations that were family duty stations to take the family along and receive installation-related allowances, or not to take the family and receive the non-family service allowance instead. The Commission had considered that the organizations could work on a proposal on this issue along with other duty-of-care initiatives and report back to the Commission.

20. The organizations, therefore, submitted a proposal to this 86<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission which was requested to endorse the proposal for an adaptation of the eligibility criteria for the payment of the non-family service allowance and endorse the proposed mechanism for the designation of those eligible duty stations.

21. After requesting more information about the measures that the organizations had taken under the duty of care initiative, the Commission decided to request more data from the HRN on the issue of separations from families in difficult duty stations that were not designated as non-family and decided that the issue under consideration be examined by a working group which would present its report to the 87<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission.

### **Other business**

22. At the opening of this 86<sup>th</sup> session of the Commission, and while adopting the provisional agenda, the United Nations secretariat requested to include therein the review of the local salary survey methodologies. The participants of the meeting were informed that a focus group, comprised of the UN secretariat, UNDP, UNICEF and some field-based specialized agencies, had been established by the HRN of the Chief Executives Board (CEB) to provide substantive and technical input to the Commission during its upcoming review of local salary survey

methodologies. The focus group developed a workplan to identify concerns and formulate proposals that would be provided to the ICSC secretariat in due course.

23. The UN secretariat informed the meeting that the participation of comparator employers was identified as a primary issue affecting the stability and cost of the salary survey process.

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## Annex

### **FICSA's opening statement**

Please refer to document FICSA/CIRC/1285 for a copy of the Federation's opening statement.

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### **FICSA's intervention on the review of pensionable remuneration**

FICSA actively participated in the ICSC working group on the review of pensionable remuneration held in Madrid from 29 January to 2 February of this year where the group held extensive discussions prior to considering various options presented by the ICSC secretariat relative to several elements of pensionable remuneration including the review of the common scale of staff assessment in accordance with the roadmap as approved by an earlier session of the Commission.

Given yesterday afternoon's exhaustive presentation of the working group's review of pensionable remuneration, I will keep my comments to a minimum at this moment in the discussions.

As mentioned by Enrique, the working group carefully examined several aspects of pensionable remuneration including possible alignment with the relatively new unified salary scale, the grossing-up factors and the common scale of staff assessment, in particular the representative tax systems which are taken into consideration.

As reported in the conclusion of document R.3, at paragraph 48, the working group's recommendations and conclusions were to be made with the objective of protecting the current levels of pensionable remuneration. In this respect, I would like to specifically refer to paragraph 11 where it was noted that, as some staff had already undergone significant negative changes in their compensation relatively recently, and as the application of single rates of staff assessment was likely to result in lower levels of pensionable remuneration than what the dependency rates of staff assessment would produce, that change was seen as undesirable. In view of this, the representatives of the organizations had noted that there might be merit in not pursuing any changes to the current calculations.

In subsequent discussions in the working group, however, it was FICSA's understanding that the ICSC secretariat had assured the participants of the working group that there would be no negative consequences in pensionable remuneration for staff in the General Service category with the possible exception of a small number of G.7 level staff in a high-paying duty station such as Geneva who would, however, be protected. This is reflected in the conclusion of document R.3, at paragraph 48, which specifies that representatives from the organizations stated that their agreement with the recommendations of the working group was premised on the assumption that there would be no negative consequence for staff in the General Service category in particular.

In fact, it was only due to those assurances from the ICSC secretariat that FICSA, as a member of the working group, was able to accept that the single rates would be applied for staff assessment purposes, without the spouse allowance.

Having noted during Enrique's presentation of yesterday his reference to some General Service staff in the grades G.4 through G.7 based in Geneva possibly being negatively affected, we would like to seek the ICSC's assurances that such consequences would affect only a very small number of colleagues and that, in such cases, the same type of grandfathering would be applied as was done with the introduction of the unified salary scale.

Given the current unrest amongst Geneva-based staff in the Professional and higher categories due to the Commission's decisions relative to the recent cost of living survey and subsequent reduction in the post allowance, FICSA is convinced that this would not be the right time to make any reductions in the pensionable remuneration of General Service staff wherever they may be based.

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### **FICSA's intervention on the framework for human resources: update on diversity/gender**

FICSA would like to thank the ICSC secretariat for the preparation of document R.4 which provides us with the background and update on diversity and gender within the framework for human resources management.

Although FICSA fully supports the proposed action requesting the Commission to approve the proposed workforce diversity component for the human resources management framework, we are of the view that the Commission can do even more to help the UN and common system organizations "walk the talk" on the organizations' public commitments, campaigns and technical cooperation with Member States, in particular in regard to non-discrimination.

As we heard last week when the Commission was discussing another agenda item, some family duty stations can become de facto non-family locations for various reasons. Some of those reasons can apply, in particular, to women as well as LGBTI colleagues who, due to their gender or sexual preference, face additional threats of violence.

I was pleased to read at paragraph 6 of the document currently being considered that a few organizations have policies to avoid discrimination, including against persons with disabilities and persons with HIV/AIDS. However, I would be interested to know the actual numbers of staff with disabilities currently working in the organizations.

We believe that organizations cannot count on policies alone to achieve a fully diverse and inclusive workforce. In other words, we need to look beyond policies by taking concrete actions to identify and recruit a diverse pool of staff.

Some of those actions can include reaching out to universities, industry organizations, associations and the like as well as organizing venues for networking and mentoring, bearing in mind that addressing diversity is not just about hiring a more diverse workforce. Further actions need to be taken to help ensure that, once hired, a diverse workforce can be retained. Therefore, diversity and inclusion need to extend beyond HR to the entire organization.

The UN Cares "UN for All" training programme is an example of a useful platform for promoting a diverse and inclusive workforce from which organizations can seek inspiration.

Furthermore, organizations may wish to consider modernizing their parental leave policies to make them better aligned with the UN Secretary-General's gender equality strategy with a view to promoting gender equality and family-friendly workplaces.

While taking note of the references to harassment in document R.4, we would like to inform that the FICSA membership adopted, at its recent annual Council session, a resolution on harassment which, while noting concern over reports of harassment experienced by UN system staff and other personnel in their workplace and the resulting harm to those colleagues, underscored the need for all organizations to uphold fully the UN policy of zero tolerance for all forms of harassment in the workplace. FICSA welcomes the establishment by the UN Secretary-General of a task force in order to step up efforts to tackle harassment and boost support for all those who have experienced harassment of any kind and also welcomes the Secretary-General's announced plans to survey all UN staff on the prevalence of harassment and reporting rates. FICSA will invite the Secretary-General to consider the creation of a UN system-wide campaign to educate staff and other personnel on their rights in the workplace, and the means whereby they can secure access to support services and formal complaint and internal justice mechanisms.

FICSA will be calling on all Executive Heads, if they have not already done so, to make it mandatory for their staff and other personnel to complete the UN system-wide e-learning module on *Prevention of Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Authority in the Workplace*.

Finally, FICSA will be calling on all Executive Heads to review, jointly with staff representatives, their organizations' policies on harassment or to formulate and implement policies, if none exist, to ensure that there is clear guidance on what constitutes harassment and abuse of authority, as well as how unacceptable behaviour will be addressed, in accordance with this body's Standards of Conduct and taking into account best practice.

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### **FICSA's intervention on post adjustment issues: report of the Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions (ACPAQ) on its fortieth session and agenda for the forty-first session**

First of all, I would like to begin by saying that FICSA actively participated in the recent session of ACPAQ and is pleased to be able to confirm that the meeting was collaborative and productive, and we look forward to the implementation of many of the recommendations which were made by the ICSC's consultant and agreed upon by ACPAQ to strengthen the methodology used for purposes of establishing the post adjustment index. It was agreed that some of those recommendations would be implemented on an urgent basis, whereas some others will be implemented on a medium term basis and, finally, some will require further study and eventual modelling.

This having been said, please allow me to recall, however, the discussions of last summer's session of the Commission in Vienna, and the conference room paper submitted to that session by the Geneva-based organizations and which contained, amongst other items, a report established by the team of senior statisticians appointed by the HR Network to undertake a targeted review of the ICSC cost-of-living survey in Geneva in order to ascertain whether, from a

statistical perspective, the calculations used in the 2016 survey round could be considered of good quality and sufficiently robust to be designated 'fit for purpose'.

The report of the senior statisticians, which was divided into five sections, provided a summary of the most important key messages, identified issues which needed to be immediately addressed if the ICSC calculations were to be considered 'fit for purpose', highlighted a number of methodological issues sufficiently problematic to be considered urgent and requiring correction before the next round of place-to-place surveys, provided a brief discussion of the 'gap closure measure' changed in 2015 and, finally, provided a summary conclusion and some general recommendations regarding the ICSC programme and procedures.

In their conclusions, the senior statisticians wrote that they had identified a number of serious calculation and systemic errors in the compilation of the ICSC results and that, as a consequence, they could not consider the ICSC calculations as compiled for Geneva to be of sufficiently good quality to be designated as 'fit for purpose'. The statisticians also concluded that the implementation by the ICSC did not always correspond with the 'approved' methodology described in the formal documentation and that a number of methodological changes introduced since 2010 had increased the instability and volatility of the indices used to calculate the cost-of-living comparisons.

We were disappointed that there was no real discussion, in our view, of this conference room paper at the July 2017 session of the Commission. Through informal consultations during that session, we had understood that a tri-partite working group was going to be created to address the issues identified by the team of senior statisticians, but this never came about. However, prior to the 40th ACPAQ session, the ICSC secretariat engaged the services of a consultant to review the post adjustment index methodology, and his report was the main subject of discussions at the recent ACPAQ session in February of this year. Although the report of the ICSC consultant seemed to be designed in such a way as to focus more on the future, and provided a sound basis on which to undertake a holistic review of the methodology, as opposed to correcting errors identified in the 2016 survey, we believe it speaks volumes that the consultant's report contains no less than 64 recommendations. FICSA has expressed its appreciation to the ICSC consultant for his extensive review of the methodology and would like to reiterate that we supported most of his recommendations as discussed in the recent session of ACPAQ.

In respect to some of the significant issues raised by the senior statisticians of the HR Network relative to the 2016 round of surveys, FICSA would like to respectfully request that those issues be urgently addressed including corrective action to the 2016 surveys.

The Commission will recall that the use of European Comparison Programme (ECP) data was introduced for purposes of price data collection in the 2016 round of surveys in European HQ duty stations (Rome, Madrid, Paris, London and Vienna). When ACPAQ opted for the use of ECP data, staff representatives were given every assurance that the item specifications and collection methods of the ECP were reliable and similar to those applied by the ICSC. At that time, it was argued that if the ICSC secretariat were to draw on ECP data rather than collect it themselves, it would save time and costs. However, after using such data in the 2016 survey round, the ICSC secretariat discovered serious differences between the ECP and ICSC price-collection exercises and decided to implement a Survey Transition Factor (STF).

In order to account for the methodological differences between the ICSC and ECP survey systems, and upon the request by ACPAQ, the ICSC secretariat conducted its own survey in Brussels over the period 8 - 19 May 2017 in accordance with its procedures and guidelines. Upon completion of the survey, the ICSC presented a new Survey Transition Factor (STF) of 18.4% to be applied to all duty stations covered by the ECP.

At the ICSC session in July 2017, FICSA questioned the statistical viability of the analysis. We argued that an STF of 18.4% calculated solely on the basis of prices collected in Brussels could not be valid for the other ECP-covered duty stations, all of which had different conditions.

This is now confirmed by the ICSC consultant who criticized the use of ECP data and wrote that “The proffered solution from the ICSC is to use a correction coefficient computed from the study for the Belgian price relatives for other ECP-covered duty stations during this 2016 survey round. This is clearly not tenable in the future.” He added by writing that “In the light of the above serious differences between the ECP and ICSC price collection exercises, the ICSC may wish to consider carefully the continued use of ECP data and, even more so, the move to extend this further by accessing other 3<sup>rd</sup> party price data.”

In view of the significant differences between the objectives, coverage and methods of the ECP price collection and that of the ICSC, FICSA holds the strong view that the use of ECP must be discontinued. We believe this is but further evidence that the 5% gap closure measure should never have been discontinued.

Regarding the use of the ISRP data, the senior statistician nominated by the HR Network found that the data used for the survey in Geneva indicated a significant downward trend in rents for the period covered by the survey (2010 - 2016), whereas the rent statistics gathered and published by the Statistical Office of the Canton of Geneva for the same period revealed a steep upward trend. To enhance transparency, we respectfully request that in the future members of the Local Survey Committee be permitted to participate in the selection of the neighbourhoods.

It is our sincere hope that through these explanations the distinguished members of the Commission will be in a better position to understand the growing staff unrest and hundreds of legal appeals currently being filed in the international organizations based in Geneva. In fact, the staff representatives and organizations find themselves confronted with a situation not seen since the 1980s.

FICSA appreciates the Commission’s consideration of the recommendations contained in the ICSC consultant’s report. We strongly believe that there are options available to the Commission which could help to either resolve or at least ease the current situation, and we would respectfully like to request the Commission to take corrective action in this regard.

If I may quote a distinguished member of the Commission “When the will is there, there must be a way”.

**2nd FICSA intervention on post adjustment issues** (the following morning)

Good morning Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Commission,

Following the positive comments made by two members of the Commission towards the end of yesterday's meeting, and subsequent staff representative discussions, we believe that this could be a positive development, and we look forward to continuing discussions along those lines.

In the best interests of the staff and the organizations, we assure you of our full commitment to open and honest dialogue to identify a solution that will help resolve this very tense situation in Geneva and other European duty stations. We would respectfully request that you seriously take into consideration our views and concerns expressed yesterday, and we count on your wisdom to provide something tangible that we can offer to staff relative to corrections and implementation of the 2016 surveys.

**3rd FICSA intervention on post adjustment issues**

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members of the Commission,

We appreciate the ICSC secretariat taking the time on Wednesday to explain to us the implementation of the gap closure measure.

Much has been said about the gap closure measure and the UN General Assembly Resolution, but let's put the facts right.

The 5 per cent gap closure measure was discontinued by the Commission in 2015. Paragraph 64 (b) of the ICSC 2015 annual report (A/70/30) informs that the ICSC modified the gap closure measure in determining the post adjustment multiplier applicable to a duty station by abolishing the 5 per cent augmentation of the post adjustment index derived from negative place-to-place survey results.

Subsequently, the UN General Assembly took note of the ICSC report.

In 2017, due to the issues raised in relation to the 2016 cost of living surveys, the Commission exercised its prerogative mandate and implemented a 3 per cent gap closure.

Based on the above, we believe that it is indeed within the mandate of the Commission to establish measures to address issues related to operational rules.

The UN General Assembly request to the "Commission to review the gap closure measure in the post adjustment system during its next round of cost-of-living surveys" should also be seen from a different perspective, for it can also mean that the UN General Assembly identified the need for the gap closure measure and simply requested the ICSC to determine the appropriate percentage thereof.

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### **Identification of the highest-paid national civil service (Noblemaire study): phase I**

FICSA would like to thank the ICSC secretariat for document R.6 which contains the results relative to the phase I analysis, and the four steps in that phase, of the current Noblemaire study. We note that the ICSC conducts a periodical review of the Noblemaire approximately every five years to identify the highest paid national civil service, and we are of course aware that the United States federal civil service has always been retained as the comparator.

In accordance with step 3 of phase I, cash and non-cash compensation for representative grades in selected national civil services was evaluated, and we now have the compensation comparison results in Section III of the present document under consideration.

When I initially read this document, I had questions about the use of the terms cash remuneration as opposed to net pay. However, paragraph 30, which clearly refers to net pay, states that none of the national civil services under the current study were found to exceed the United States federal civil service in terms of net cash compensation. Therefore, the ICSC secretariat informs us that, with the exception of Belgium, it would not appear to be worth considering any of the countries for phase II analysis, given the differences in pay.

The information contained in document R.6 would cause the reader to question whether it is necessary to proceed to Phase II. However, as we heard from the HR Network just now, it is important that we have access to all of the facts. In this respect, we would like to better understand why Switzerland was apparently eliminated from the comparison during the size criterion stage as mentioned during this morning's presentation. FICSA fully supports that the ICSC secretariat conducts an updated reference check with other international organizations and present the results at its eighty-seventh session.

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### **Hardship allowance: classification methodology – impact of the revision of the criteria for overall categorization**

FICSA would like to thank the ICSC secretariat for the informative document R.7 on the review of the methodology used for purposes of classifying hardship duty stations and on the testing of Model 2 for the annual review meeting dedicated to Africa in November 2017.

Our representative who participated in that meeting reported to us that the review went smoothly.

FICSA would like to take this opportunity to recognize the work put into this review by the Tripartite Working Group established to review the classification of hardship duty stations. Based on the group's collective knowledge and experience, it made adjustments in the methodology where deemed necessary and defensible. At a time when some UN organizations are increasingly off-shoring services away from headquarters duty stations, and is operating in risky and insecure locations or in very remote and isolated places, it is now even more important to classify the duty stations where the UN operates in a fair, consistent, easy-to-explain and pragmatic way. This mechanism must also respond to the Duty of Care obligations of the UN Organizations whereby the HLCM Task Force on Duty of Care has been mandated to take into consideration the revision of the criteria for the classification of hardship duty stations and the

adoption of flexibility measures for staff with families assigned to “family duty stations” that are not conducive to family life.

We note with appreciation some of the changes introduced into the methodology used to classify hardship duty stations by aligning other sub-factors such as health, isolation, local conditions and housing with the other sub-factor which is, of course, security. We understand that this was done with the purpose of assessing in a tangible way the overall quality of life and work of UN system staff in the field.

FICSA welcomes the push for better access to health data through an improved and simplified questionnaire to be made available in electronic format by the UN Medical Services. We expect that new tool will be particularly useful prior to the deployment of international staff, as it will help better promote some duty stations that are not considered staff-friendly. It is reassuring to see that the UN Medical Services has started work on improving the evaluation of the health factors and aligning with health risks assessment methodology for improved health ratings.

Although FICSA is a strong advocate of assigning high importance to the security factor, we are also of the view that duty stations which do not have security challenges per se, but have significant hardship due to physical or social isolation, poor local conditions, insufficient health facilities or poor housing conditions should be systematically or consistently treated in a similar fashion.

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### **Family duty stations with hardship classifications of D or E**

FICSA welcomes the proposal which has been put forward and which confirms that the safety and security indicators continue to be of paramount importance when designating that the presence of families is not allowed for security reasons. The other encouraging part of the proposal is the call for a systematic consideration of other factors in the overall classification of a specific hardship duty station, such as the availability of a sound educational system and the access thereto, the availability and access to health care facilities locally, the level of local isolation (socially, culturally and otherwise), the level of readiness on the part of the host country to facilitate the entry and residency status to eligible family members. This consideration introduces the possibility for staff members, based in duty stations where there are no security restrictions, to make an informed choice on whether or not to bring along their family members to a duty station which is assessed as presenting many challenges in terms of overall living conditions.

We are encouraged by the development in the discussions which I believe started only a few months ago, and which has the merit of offering the possibility of choice on the part of UN system staff members. On the side of UN organizations, it will also be possible to show a degree of adaptation in defining the eligibility for the payment of the non-family service allowance. Our federation believes this should be acknowledged as a major step in the right direction.

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