

Statement by the Union of General Service Staff of FAO and WFP (UGSS) to the Annual Session
of the WFP Executive Board, 13 June 2019

Mister President, Distinguished members of the Executive Board, Mister Executive Director, colleagues of the Professional Staff Association, Ladies and Gentlemen, good morning. On behalf of the Union of General Service Staff of FAO and WFP, I would like to thank you for granting us the opportunity to address the Board once again.

It is with pleasure that we inform you that the recruitment exercise following the seven-year freeze on Headquarters General Service Recruitment is well under way. In this regard, we would like to thank the Director and Deputy Director, HR and the staff of the office of Talent, Deployment and Career Management, as well as the Staff Relations Officer who have worked so hard on this Herculean task, and with so few resources. We also thank the staff who dedicated their precious time and expertise to participate in the Review Groups and the Selection Panels. The ongoing exercise has so far resulted in the filling of 64 posts at the G-3 level and 35 posts at the G-4, which is a positive result for the GS staff at HQ, and for WFP because it can now count on a more stable work force for part of its core business. The process has not been without hiccups and important lessons have been learned for the future.

The filling of posts also confers benefit on the Pension Fund, which will now receive guaranteed contributions from these new staff members, and in this regard, we would like to invite WFP to renew its commitment to the well-being of all the people who work for the Programme by also reviewing other types of contracts, and in particular long-term consultancies, which do not bring benefits to nor benefit from the Pension Fund. No less than 57% of the entire workforce in HQ are on temporary contracts which creates a high level of inequality amongst colleagues performing analogous functions.

We commend WFP Management for the efforts to eradicate harassment in all its forms. The new, broader policy has been issued and there are no longer time bars which will prevent staff from reporting events which took place more than six months previously. We hope that all managers will take harassment claims seriously and that all claims will be treated with the same care and attention. We urge OIGI and the Office of the Ombudsman to examine all claims assiduously. Moreover, it is essential that staff feel protected and secure when reporting wrongdoing and we encourage WFP Management to ensure that the Whistleblower policy is fully and fairly implemented.

We should like to address the question of space and the fact that the building has been filled to over-capacity. We understand that new premises will be ready by the second half of next year, however, many staff have been feeling the effects of the over-crowding for far too long now, and this is proving to be detrimental on the effectiveness of the workplace. More effort to alleviate the distress, such as the installation of sound proof panels would go a long way to minimizing disruptions and creating a more enabling environment.

On a more positive note, we are pleased to advise you that UGSS has been invited to participate in the overhaul of Performance and Competency Enhancement (PACE) process and will also be contributing to a review of the current generic job profiles. The intention is to provide well-defined Vacancy Announcements and a framework which will provide both candidates and managers with a clear baseline from which to work.

The staff would also like to recognize the efforts of WFP Management to re-open the Commissary. The abrupt closure, without proper consultation, has been construed as an infringement of our contractual rights. WFP Management has been working with FAO Management to ensure that the Commissary is re-opened, and we are reassured that WFP Management is committed to achieving this.

UGSS is very concerned with the WFP departure from the Joint Advisory Committee on Medical Coverage (JAC/MC). While we understand the reasons for WFP management's enthusiasm in attempting a solo tender regarding medical insurance for its staff, we are concerned with the disruption of a long-standing tradition of collaboration between the Rome Based Agencies (RBAs) on this and other issues. We trust that consultation with the recognized staff representatives will be sought and maintained on all issues related to staff well-being.

To conclude, UGSS wish to express gratitude to the out-going HR Director, John Aylieff, for the positive changes he has made for the General Service Staff. He has been a pleasure to work with and we cannot deny our disappointment in seeing him leave HQ.

At the same time, we look forward to working with the new HR Director, Joyce Luma, and trust that we shall continue to enjoy an equally respectful and productive spirit of collaboration.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Thank you for your attention.