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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

Status of women in the Professional category and above:
a progress report

Comments by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit for consideration by the General Assembly the comments by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination with regard to the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Status of women in the Professional category and above: a progress report" (A/35/182).

ANNEX

Comments by the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

I. GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

1. In accordance with article 11 of the statute of the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the executive heads of the organizations within the United Nations system, having consulted within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), have agreed upon the following comments on the progress report on the status of women in the Professional category and above (JIU/REP/80/4). These comments are limited to those issues of policy which affect the United Nations common system as a whole, without prejudice to any individual comments which may be made by the executive heads.

2. The above-mentioned report is a follow-up to the report on women in the Professional category and above in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/77/7) prepared by JIU in December 1977. ^{1/} It was prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 33/143 of 20 December 1978, in which the Assembly requested JIU to continue to study and report on the provisions of the resolution dealing with, *inter alia*, the improvement of the representation of women in the Professional and higher categories in the United Nations system, the first report to be submitted to the General Assembly at its thirty-fifth session.

3. The progress report covers the same 11 organizations covered in the first report and gives a brief overview of the action taken by them to effect the recommendations of the first report; it thus updates the information contained in the 1977 report. Since it does not contain any new substantive policy recommendations, the comments of the organizations parallel, and to some extent repeat, those made already in 1978.

^{1/} For comments of ACC on that report, see document CO-ORDINATION/R.1294/Add.1.

II. COMMENTS UPON SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

A. The role of the administrations

4. Paragraphs 1 and 11 of the recommendations urge the executive heads and legislative bodies to continue to follow closely the problem of representation of women in the Professional category, particularly at the higher levels, by making their interest in the matter known to the staff of the organizations and reviewing measures already established to bring about an equitable balance between men and women.

5. The executive heads continue to recognize the importance of providing direction and establishing procedures for increasing the participation of women on equal terms with men in the work of the secretariats, and they consider that although progress has not perhaps been as rapid as might have been desired, the report does contain evidence to show that organizations are making continuing efforts to achieve it. As noted in the report, several new initiatives have been taken in some of the organizations, in particular the publication or revision of policy statements and directives.

6. The executive heads note that the information contained in the progress report provides evidence to support the contention already advanced in 1978 that the review of the situation in the organizations with regard to the employment of women should not take place too frequently. The rate of change in this area is such that significant changes can be discerned only over a relatively long period - say five years. The personnel statistics, which are collected by the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) on an annual basis, would provide some information in the interval between over-all reviews.

B. Measures to improve recruitment

7. The inspector reiterates some of the recommendations made in 1977 for achieving an increase in the proportion of women on the staffs of the organizations through improved recruitment policies and procedures. They can be summarized as follows:

(a) Organizations, especially the larger ones, should establish challenging targets for increasing the proportion of women in the Professional category (para. 2).

(b) Member States should be urged to assume their share of responsibility in achieving the goal of more equitable representation of women by nominating more female candidates (para. 3).

(c) Offices of personnel in the organizations should be directed to take action to increase the proportion of women by conducting special recruitment missions, working with government representatives, contacting organizations which are aware of qualified women and monitoring carefully the reactions of substantive units to women candidates (para. 4).

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(d) The recruitment of young women at the lower grades should be increased in order to enable them to make a career in the organizations; concomitantly recruitment of qualified women at levels higher than P-3 should be stepped up (para. 5).

8. The organizations have already accepted the premise of the proposal to set targets for the employment of women. They continue to believe, however, that the target figure must bear a reasonable relationship to actual needs and that some organizations, in particular the smaller ones, will have less scope for the use of targets. Some organizations continue to face real obstacles to "affirmative action" because of contracted activities and freezes on recruitment. The more technically oriented organizations find also that there is a real scarcity of women working in certain disciplines.

9. The organizations accept the inspector's suggestion relating to the organization of recruitment missions and the efforts to increase the number of young women recruited at lower grades. Some of them are nevertheless obliged to concentrate their recruitment on older candidates having a required level of experience. In this sense they would be in a better position to follow the inspector's suggestion that qualified women at levels higher than P-3 should also be recruited at an increased rate. The two suggestions appear to be contradictory, but the organizations believe that efforts can be made to implement them in tandem.

10. The organizations endorse fully the inspector's recommendation that Member States should assume their share of responsibility in achieving the goal of more equitable representation of women. All organizations rely to a greater or lesser extent on national administrations for presentation of suitable candidates. If among those candidates there are not a sufficient number of qualified women, then the situation with respect to their recruitment cannot be expected to improve significantly. The adoption by the organizations of policy statements and recruitment procedures designed to increase the number of women in the secretariats will be of little use if Member States do not assist the organizations by putting forward the necessary candidates.

C. Measures to ensure equality of treatment in service

11. In paragraphs 6, 7, 8 and 10 of the recommendations the inspector deals with internal administrative procedures relating to the treatment of women in appointment, training and promotion. The measures outlined therein call for:

(a) An increase in the percentage of women appointed to advisory boards or bodies (para. 6);

(b) The review of training opportunities for women in order to enhance their career development (para. 7);

(c) The review of promotion procedures and practices to ensure equal opportunity for women to advance to higher professional levels (para. 8);

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(d) The assignment to one of the personnel advisory boards in each organization of the responsibility for monitoring the efforts of the organization to improve the representation of women and their promotion and career prospects. This board should report each year to the executive head on the results achieved and problems faced (para. 10).

12. As the organizations indicated in their collective response to the 1977 report, the suggestions made already form part of the practice of the organizations in most cases. They are keenly aware of the need to ensure that fairness and impartiality are hallmarks of the work of internal advisory boards and that the staff have full confidence that the advice being given to the executive head is free of any discriminatory bias. They continue to feel that procedures alone, however refined and responsive, are not sufficient in themselves to remove all barriers to a substantial and rapid increase in the number of women in Professional positions in the organizations.

13. With regard to training and career development opportunities, the International Civil Service Commission is actively examining this question and the organizations therefore consider that problems relating to career development and training for women should form an integral part of the general examination of that issue.

D. Other measures

14. The inspector proposes in paragraph 9 of his recommendations that the organizations should consider extending the practice of part-time employment as soon as possible in order to provide additional incentive to married women to accept employment.

15. As noted by the organizations in 1978, part-time employment has been introduced where it has been found desirable. If a number of organizations have not yet done so or have done so only in respect of limited categories of staff, it is for reasons relating to the nature of the work in those organizations and the size of the secretariat. The organizations nevertheless continue to keep the possibility of part-time work under review and accept the premise that such work does help to increase the number of women on the staff by allowing them to combine their family responsibilities with their professional careers.

III. SUGGESTED ACTION

16. In the light of the foregoing comments the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination suggests that the General Assembly should:

(a) Take note of the report prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit on the status of women in the Professional category and above (JIU/REP/80/4);

(b) Note the efforts made by the organizations within the United Nations common system towards achieving greater participation of women on equal terms with men in the work of the secretariats;

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(c) Recommend that such efforts should be pursued;

(d) Reiterate its invitation to Member States to extend their co-operation to the appropriate services of the organizations in the recruitment of women for positions in the Professional and higher categories;

(e) Request the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination, to report to the General Assembly, at its fortieth session, on progress made in the employment of women in the organizations of the United Nations common system.