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JOINT INSPECTION UNIT

PERSONNEL QUESTIONS

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

Comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly the comments of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination on the report of the Joint Inspection Unit entitled "Status of women in the Professional category and above: second progress report" (A/37/469).

ANNEX

Comments of 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, having consulted within the framework of the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC), have agreed upon the following comments on the above-mentioned report. These comments are limited to those issues of policy which affect the United Nations system as a whole, without prejudice to any individual comments which may be made by the executive heads.
2. The report (A/37/469) is a follow-up to the report on women in the Professional category and above in the United Nations system (A/33/105) prepared by JIU in December 1977, and to the first progress report issued by JIU in 1980 (A/35/182). (The comments of ACC on the original report and on the first progress report were contained in General Assembly documents A/33/105/Add.1 and A/35/182/Add.1, respectively.) It was prepared in response to a request of the Assembly, in its resolution 35/210, section V, that the JIU continue to monitor developments on the status of women in the Professional category and above in the United Nations system, and report to the Assembly not later than at its thirty-seventh session. The resolution expressed deep concern at the lack of progress in increasing the proportion of women in the Secretariat and called upon Member States and the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the executive heads of the other organizations to take specific action.
3. The present report covers 12 of the organizations of the United Nations system and gives a brief overview of the action taken in them to give effect to the recommendations of the first and second reports; it thus updates the information contained in the 1977 and 1980 reports.

II. COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

4. The report (A/37/469) does not contain any new recommendations, but paragraph 34 of that report reiterates some of the recommendations made in 1980, sometimes with greater emphasis. Thus, recommendation (a) of paragraph 34 repeats a recommendation urging 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 demonstrating effectively an unequivocal interest in this matter and by reviewing measures already established and new ones which might be introduced in order to bring about an equitable balance between men and women.
5. The report contains evidence to show that organizations are making continuing efforts to increase the participation of women on equal terms with men in the work of the secretariats. The executive heads continue to provide direction and

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establish procedures to this end. In doing so, they are obliged to bear in mind at all times the aggregate of policy considerations relating to the administration of the organizations, as dictated by decisions of legislative bodies or by the prevailing conditions in the international community. Their ability to achieve results in respect of any one factor, such as the status of women, is to a great extent conditioned by their being in a position to reconcile often competing requirements.

6. The executive heads are glad to note that this report gives increased recognition to the responsibility of Member States in achieving the goal of more equitable representation of women by putting forward more women candidates (recommendation (b)). The organizations accept the recommendation that personnel offices should work closely with Government representatives in making contact with local organizations which may be aware of qualified women candidates. They recall, however, the comment made in this respect in 1980, to the effect that the adoption of policy statements and recruitment procedures designed to increase the number of women in the secretariats would be of little use if Member States did not assist them by putting forward the necessary candidates. Also, organizations must not neglect sources of recruitment other than national services, which, in some cases, are the source of more suitable candidates than national services.

7. The report illustrates that progress has been made in the proportion of women among staff recruited to the secretariats, which in several organizations is around 25 per cent. The organizations note that this corresponds approximately to the figure adopted by several of them as the target for the proportion of women in the secretariats. They consider that this is a hopeful sign but, at the same time, they recognize that, at such a rate of recruitment, the achievement of the desired overall proportion of women in the secretariats is bound to be slower than might be wished.

8. With regard to targets (recommendation (c)), the organizations must recall that in some of them, in particular the smaller ones, they will be of limited use. Organizations continue to face obstacles to "affirmative action" because of contracted activities. They fully endorse the inspector's observation that the availability of qualified women is often limited by the technical nature of a specialized discipline, in which there may simply be few women. The requirement that geographical distribution considerations be borne in mind at all times further limits the efforts being made to improve the proportion of women. The two major policy objectives of better geographical distribution and more women, in particular in high-level posts, are not always complementary.

9. The report again urges organizations to review promotion procedures and practices, as well as training offered to women in the Professional category, in order to ensure equal opportunities for women to advance to higher Professional levels (recommendation (d)). It proposes that at least one qualified woman should be included in each "short-list" of names considered for Professional posts; if a head of department rejects a woman recommended for appointment, detailed justification should be required (recommendation (e)).

10. As the organizations indicated in their collective response to the 1980 report, the suggestions already made form part of the practice of the organizations

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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 entire 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.

11. With regard to training and career development opportunities for women, the International Civil Service Commission has examined this question and has concluded that problems relating to career development and training for women should form an integral part of the general training and career development programmes of the organizations. It has recommended to organizations "that they not institute special career development programmes which would either single out and 'groom' for higher grades or establish target quotas at given grade levels for women, young people, certain nationals or any other group to which any staff member of the organization is not eligible to belong. However, in those cases where disparate treatment of these groups has been found to exist, organizations may find it necessary to institute training programmes which would prepare members of such groups so that they are able to compete on an equal footing with all other staff for career development opportunities". 1/ This approach, which the organizations on the whole endorse, represents a balanced way of dealing with the problem of reconciling the legitimate interests of all groups of staff, and should enable organizations to avoid the pitfall of "reverse discrimination".

12. In paragraph 33 of the report, the inspector expressed the belief that a day-care centre, or suitable alternative arrangements would facilitate the recruitment and retention of women. He then expressed the hope that organizations which do not have day-care facilities should explore the possibility of establishing them where the need for them is recognized. The organizations agree that the provision of child-care facilities is a matter of social policy and that the organizations should provide assistance and, where feasible, financial support for the establishment and maintenance of such facilities in duty stations where the need for them is demonstrated.

13. Finally, the executive heads accept the recommendation that ACC should continue to monitor regularly the status of women in the Professional category and above (recommendation (f)). They continue to believe that, in matters of this kind, reporting at too frequent intervals is not helpful. Organizations would, of course, at all times continue their efforts to develop, on an interagency basis where appropriate, policies designed to ensure that women enjoy a status equal to that of men in the organizations.

III. SUGGESTED ACTION

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

- (a) Take note of the second progress report prepared by the Joint Inspection Unit on the status of women in the Professional category and above;

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(b) Note the efforts made by the organizations of the United Nations common system towards achieving greater participation of women on equal terms with men in the work of the secretariats, and recommend that these efforts be pursued;

(c) 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;

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

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 30 (A/35/30), para. 289.
