

SUC/GA/2001/3

**UNITED NATIONS  
ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA  
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA**

**SECOND CUM THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE  
ECA STAFF UNION**

**REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE STAFF UNION COMMITTEE**

3 JULY 2001

Dear Colleagues,

This report is being presented to the Second cum Third General Assembly of the ECA Staff Union in accordance with Article III/4(b) and (c) of the Statutes.

It will be recalled that an interim report was submitted on the March-October 2000 activities of your Committee at the First General Assembly. The current report is a review of the first 15 months of the 2000-2001 work programme which was established at the beginning of the 2000-2001 biennium and approved by the First General Assembly in October 2000.

The work plan was based on the SUC's mandate that includes:  
.Negotiating so that the positions and interests of staff members are defended vis a vis the Management in an equitable, consistent and unified manner;  
.Coordinating matters concerning the interest and welfare of staff members

The Staff Union Committee has accomplished the following tasks during the first 15 months of its term of office.

## **I. Restoring the credibility of SUC to staff, the management and other stakeholders**

### **I.a Relations with Management**

The SUC wishes to have harmonious relations with Management. It believes in negotiations and consultations as a way of achieving its desired goals. There is a clear understanding between the SUC and the Management that both do serve the same staff. In this regard, the work of one can only reinforce that of the other. With this in mind, the SUC has established good relations with Management, which has already yielded positive results. For example, because the comments and observations made by the SUC at the End of Year Statement of the Executive Secretary were taken seriously by Management, we have noted actions taken on a number of them. As a result of the good relations and the credibility won by the SUC, it was once invited by HRSS to give comments on the 2001 Work Plan of HRSS. The SUC provided constructive comments that the OIC of HRSS promised to take into consideration seriously.

The SUC also contributed to the ongoing study by Management on the possible ways and means of improving the employment conditions of those GS staff at higher levels. Furthermore, the SUC contributed to a paper prepared by HRSS on the living conditions of staff at ECA. The paper was sent to OHRM as the request had come from them.

The SUC has been launching joint projects with the Management on many issues including, conditions of living of staff such as the Salary Survey for the General Service staff and the Place to Place Survey for the Professional staff; recreation center; UN Staff AIDS Solidarity Event; and the recruitment campaign.

Of course, that relations between the SUC and Management are healthy does not mean that each side agrees to what the other side wants. There are cases where agreements were reached and others where agreements were not reached. The SUC will continue to negotiate and consult in its efforts to achieve its goals.

## **II. Ensuring the proper interpretation and implementation of the UN Charter, UN Staff Rules and Regulations and other Administrative Issuances**

### **1I.a. Classification of GS Posts**

The SUC attaches great importance to the classification exercise. It has decided to be represented by its President in the Classification Committee. Moreover, the SUC has been vigilant to see that the ongoing classification exercise does not repeat past mistakes. The SUC is against a piece-meal implementation of the classification results, as this does not address the problems of the staff at large.

The classification outcomes are expected to be completed soon. The next challenge is how to implement the classification results. The SUC will endeavour to ensure that the outcome of the implementation of the classification results meets staff expectations and organizational goals, *inter alia*, enhanced promotion and recruitment as well as creation of a structure that allows for career progression.

### **1I.b Long serving and meritorious staff**

The question of the long serving and meritorious staff who are completely despondent has been raised with Management at different times, including at the End of Year Statement with the Executive Secretary in January 2001, and with Ms R. Salim, ASG for Human Resources Management in February 2001. It was mentioned that there are staff members who served the Organization diligently and resourcefully for many years without any kind of recognition or career development. In the absence of training, promotion, and mobility, the SUC said that those staff members would remain frustrated. The SUC, thus, requested for motivational interventions such as promotion, award of letters of commendation, mission assignments, mobility and training. The SUC is pleased with the

initiative already taken by the Executive Secretary to recognize some of the meritorious staff, although we have a reservation about the process.

#### II.c Resolving Staff Issues

The SUC has assured Management that all staff cases and other Staff-Management problems would, to the extent possible, be resolved internally, through negotiations and sincere discussions. Referring cases to New York would be the last resort.

As a result of the negotiations and/or consultations with Management, the SUC has managed to resolve a number of staff matters. However, the SUC remains concerned by the big time lag between the time an agreement is reached and the time of its implementation.

An area where the SUC has been active and effective is counseling. The SUC has prevented a number of cases from becoming issues of litigation.

#### II.d Outreach and Representation outside Addis Ababa

##### i. SMCC XXIV:

The SUC was represented at SMCC XXIV meeting by its President and Vice President. The delegation contributed a lot to the staff representatives' position on the Human Resources Management Reform of the United Nations, drafted by OHRM. The contributions were made through both written comments and active participation in the SMCC XXIV meeting. The delegation also prepared a document on a local issue dealing with the effects of the devaluation of the Birr on the living conditions and pension benefits of the GS staff in Addis Ababa. A mission report was distributed to all staff members at the appropriate time.

##### ii. CCISUA XV and CCISUA XVI

The SUC actively participated in the preparations of common positions of staff representatives regarding staff matters in the UN system. The SUC also received a strong support from its partners on the question of the impact of the devaluation of the local currency and the inappropriate methodology for determining a salary scale of GS staff in Addis Ababa. Details were given in the mission reports of the SUC President to the CCISUA meetings.

### iii. Working Group on Internal Justice System

The SUC participated in the meeting of the Working Group on Internal Justice System. The meeting was held in February 2001 in New York, falling back to back with CCISUA XVI meeting. The SUC actively contributed its bit to the objectives of the Working Group. Several of the SUC's proposals were included in the recommendations of the Working Group. Details were given in the mission report of the SUC President.

### iv. Establishment of Joint Staff-Management Committees

It is well understood that most of the work and therefore the collaboration between the SUC and the Management is carried out by the various Staff-Management Bodies, composed of staff nominated by the SUC and the Management. These Staff-Management Bodies include the APC, DRPs, APP, PDG, JAC, JMC, Cafeteria Committee and Training and Staff Development Committee. All these Bodies are functional as at now, except that the PDG and the Training and Staff Development Committee were only recently established. There is also the Clinic Committee that is yet to be established, subject to the ongoing negotiation with Management.

The SUC nominated staff members who are known to do credible work in the Joint Staff-Management Bodies. The SUC is happy to announce that several of these Bodies have lived up to its expectations. We believe that their diligent and sincere work has contributed to the credibility of the SUC. The SUC is thus highly appreciative to them for their good work.

### v. Recruitment Campaign

The SUC had several negotiations and consultations with Management, at different levels, on the accountability mechanism put in place for the recruitment campaign. The SUC had earlier issued a Flash to all staff members on the details of its efforts in this area. The issue was also raised by the SUC at the End of Year Statement in January 2001. In addition, the SUC had a discussion with Ms. R. Salim, ASG for Human Resources Management, about the reaction of the staff to the way the recruitment campaign at ECA was being conducted. The belief that the process was not transparent, as far as the staff are concerned; as well as the lack of consideration for demonstrated loyalty and commitment to the Organization, seniority, institutional memory and career development for the deserving ones were mentioned as the major concerns of staff.

The staff recalls the explanations given by Management to the several issues raised at the Briefing Session held on 13 October 2000 and at the End of Year Statement by the Executive Secretary.

The first General Assembly had established a Committee to verify the concerns of the staff vis-a-vis the explanations given by Management on the recruitment campaign. Unfortunately, the Committee did not submit its work to the SUC. Apparently, the Committee had difficulties in obtaining relevant information.

### **III. Improving the living conditions of ECA staff and enhancing staff member's knowledge on pension issues**

This is an area where the SUC has acted even more aggressively. The following issues were addressed:

#### **III.a Salaries of General Service Staff**

i. The SUC prepared a position paper on the impact of the devaluation of the local currency on the living conditions and pension benefits of the GS staff in Addis Ababa. This paper was presented to CCISUA XV in March 2000 in Geneva. The paper gained support from the meeting. As a result, the president of CCISUA was requested to discuss the matter with the relevant officials in New York and then report back at CCISUA XVI. The paper also created for the ICSC officials who were attending the CCISUA meeting an awareness of the magnitude of the suffering being endured by the GS staff in Addis Ababa.

ii. At the SMCC XXIV meeting held in April 2000 in Vienna, the SUC strongly voiced the yearnings of the GS staff for a lasting solution to be found to their problems that emanated from the devaluation of the local currency. The SMCC XXIV took note of the staff concern. Consequently, the ECA management and the SUC reached an agreement with the Common System and Inter-Agency Unit in New York to conduct, before introducing a salary increase and/or special measures, a comprehensive salary survey to know the situation on the ground.

iii. With the aim of building in-house capacity in the long run and carrying out the comprehensive salary survey professionally in the short term, the SUC negotiated effectively with the Federation of International Civil Servants Associations (FICSA) to hold one of their annual regional training workshops, here in Addis Ababa. A training workshop on the Methodology of Conducting a Salary Survey for GS staff was, thus, held in January 2001 at the UNCC. Many staff

from the UN Agencies in Addis Ababa benefited from this training. The majority of these trained staff later served on the Local Salary Survey Committee (LSSC). We are grateful to the ECA management for their support in providing conference facilities. We are also thankful to FICSA for their agreement to hold the regional training workshop here in Addis Ababa and for allowing eight of our staff members to participate in the training workshop even though ECA is not a member of FICSA.

iv. The ECA Management and the SUC jointly established a Local Salary Survey Committee.

v. The SUC made an important comment on a draft staff rule prepared by the Staff Rules and Regulations Unit in OHRM on the modalities of payment of the salaries of the locally recruited GS staff. The draft rule had stated that locally recruited GS staff be paid in local currency only. The SUC's comment was that the locally recruited OS staff should be paid in hard currency if the outcome of a comprehensive salary survey warranted so. The SUC held this position in the light of its hope that, one day, the GS staff in Addis Ababa will benefit from this provision. The SUC is happy to announce that its comment has favourably been considered by OHRM and the draft rule would soon be revised accordingly.

vi. Initially, the SUC did not feel comfortable about conducting the comprehensive survey using seven comparators. It even called for a pilot survey to be conducted first. But, people in the Common System and Inter-Agency Unit, OHRM, gave us an assurance that they could make the comprehensive survey yield positive results if they were given the chance to conduct it. It was with this assurance that the SUC agreed to conduct the comprehensive survey.

vii. The SUC prepared a position paper for the 52nd meeting of the ICSC on the methodology used to determine the salary scale of the GS staff. Unfortunately, the document was not discussed as a conference paper, because the CCISUA President did not exert adequate effort in this regard. Being aware of this, the SUC President personally called the Chairman of ICSC to complain. As a result, the SUC paper was discussed under the A.O.B because, by then, the agenda for the meeting had already been adopted. The meeting took note of our argument and agreed to consider it at the next revision of salary methodology.

viii. During the preparations for the survey, the SUC noted that the reasons for placing Ethiopia in Category II, where seven comparators are required, were not justifiable. As a result, the SUC prepared a position paper that argued for the retention of Ethiopia

in Group III, where five comparators are required. The document, endorsed by ECA Management, was submitted to the ICSC through OHRM.

ix. The SUC President held meetings with different authorities in New York to discuss the above mentioned position paper. These meetings included those held between Mr. Samba Jack, the SUC President, two representatives of the ICSC and the Chief of the Common System and Inter-Agency Unit; between the SUC President and the Chairman of ICSC; between the SUC President, the Chief of Compensation and Classification Policy Unit and two Survey Specialists; as well as between the SUC President and the ASG for Human Resources Management.

The outcomes of the meetings were that:

- It would be difficult to change the categorization of Addis Ababa duty station in the midst of a five-year period, which should end in the year 2002;
- The result from using seven comparators might not be significantly different from that of using five comparators;
- A more reliable approach that could yield positive result would be to exercise flexibility in the application of the methodology;
- In exercising flexibility, the LSSC should include all potential comparators, irrespective of their number of employees and type of economic sectors;
- Unlike the common practice elsewhere, two survey specialists would be sent to Addis Ababa to cover all the potential comparators; and that
- Everything possible would be done to help alleviate the problem in Addis Ababa.

x. With the above understanding, the comprehensive survey was conducted in March 2001. The survey yielded an increase in salary by a weighted average of 12.9 per cent for GS staff.

xi. Taking into consideration the different requests made by the various Executive Secretaries of ECA and the Staff Union Committee to introduce measures that address the harsh living conditions of the GS staff emanating from the devaluation of the Birr; the SUC's ongoing request to the Pension Board to protect the dwindling pension benefits of GS staff; and the fact that the survey, by its nature, does not address all dimensions of the impact of the devaluation of the local currency, the LSSC agreed, albeit after a lengthy debate, to recommend the payment of GS salaries in local currency, but pegged



to a hard currency. The LSSC also recommended the effective date of the revision of the salary increase to be 1 July 2000.

xii. Unfortunately, not all the recommendations of the LSSC were accepted. A small remark is necessary here. The LSSC's report including the recommendations was electronically sent to New York on Friday, 4 May 2001. To our great dismay, ECA got a fax signed on Monday, 7 May 2001, by the ASG for Human Resources Management, rejecting the recommendations of the LSSC. New York people, under normal circumstances, were supposed to have waited for the opinion of the ECA Management on the report and then called a meeting of the Steering Committee to deliberate on the report of the LSSC. We did not really know why they made that hasty decision without securing the opinion of ECA Management.

xiii. Until a lasting solution is found, the SUC will continue to fight towards improving the living conditions of the General Service staff in Addis Ababa in all the appropriate forums, including in the forthcoming SMCC XXV.

In all the SUC's activities related to the salary survey, the cooperation of the ECA Management was always secured. On behalf of the staff, the SUC would like to thank the ECA Management for their cooperation.

### III.b Post Adjustment

This time around, the response rate of the professional staff to fill out and return the place-to-place survey questionnaire was much higher than before. The Chairman of the place-to-place survey, the Director of OPRM, and the President of the SUC had literally knocked at every professional staff member's door to remind him/her to complete the questionnaire. Because of the better information gathered, the survey resulted in retaining the Multiplier for Ethiopia at the same level until 28 February 2001, despite the strength of the dollar and the downward trend of the Multiplier experienced in Addis Ababa, in recent years. However, as of 1 March 2001, the base salary was increased by 3.4 percent, but the Multiplier was decreased by the same amount, thus, no change in the take-home salary. The only changes that came as a result of this arrangement, as far as ECA staffs are concerned, was the increase in pension contribution.

### III.c Pension Issues

This is an area where the SUC made a breakthrough. Because of the strong argument and the effective network that it had established, the case of Addis Ababa General Service Staff was presented to the UNJSPB for the first time as a substantive agenda item. After a heated debate on the issue, a working group was established by the UNJSPB to look into the time-to-time inconsistencies and equities in pension benefits expressed in dollar terms, created by the application of the current methodology for calculating the Final Remuneration Average (FAR). Since then, the SUC has been providing supporting statistical information to members of the Working Group. The Working Group is expected to submit its findings and recommendations to the Standing Committee of the UNJSPB in July 2001.

### III.d Networking

The SUC established an effective network among the Participants' Representatives to the UNJSPB, the ECA Management, AFICS and FUNSA. This network has greatly facilitated our cause on the impact of currency devaluation to be heard at the UNJSPB.

No doubt, the SUC has a strong network with its sister Associations, Unions or Councils in the UN System. It is through this networking that staff representatives were able to build common positions on staff issues, globally.

The SUC mobilized the ECA staff to show their solidarity with UNHCR when two UNHCR staff were brutally murdered in West Timor last year. In this connection, the staff held a silent march on 22 September 2000 in support of the safety and security of UN Personnel. A speech was also prepared and read by the President of the SUC on that occasion. The speech mentioned, among other things, the growing number and type of operations that the UN is involved in; the hazardous incidents that the staff members encounter in accomplishing their duties; the main causes for the vulnerability of UN staff in those operations; and what should be done to protect the lives of vulnerable UN staff, both at the country level and at the level of the Organization. In addition, the SUC requested the staff to sign a petition that was organized by CCISUA. The petition requested member States of the Security Council to hold a special session on staff safety and security and to address the prevailing problems faced by UN staff and associated members while in line of duty.

The SUC also established links with the SRDCs. The SUC has focal points in the SRDCs with whom it exchanges information on staff matters. For example, the SUC has received many complaints from the SRDCs about the recruitment campaign. The complaints were reflected

in the SUC's presentation to Management at different times. The SUC was also involved in the class action by the staff of SRDC-NA against their Director.

### III.e Seminars

The SUC held a pre-retirement seminar on pension issues for all staff on 21 June 2000. At that seminar, a broad spectrum of pension issues was discussed from administrative, legal and policy dimensions. The analysis of the evaluation questionnaire on the seminar indicated high satisfaction of staff members about the seminar.

The SUC is currently negotiating with ECA Management on organizing a standing and well-structured exit briefing to staff, before retirement.

As a result of the negotiation made at the SUC-Management meetings, the HRSS is now providing induction briefing to new staff. The SUC also provides induction briefing to new staff.

## **IV. Enhancing safety, security and welfare at ECA**

### IV.a Social Events

The SUC organized a UN Staff AIDS Solidarity Event to raise funds for people living with HIV/AIDS. The event took place on 7 December 2000. An amount equivalent to Birr 126,731.19 was raised from this event. Similarly, the SUC has at its disposal, unsold T-shirts, uncollected prize items and some work of art donations. An audit report on this is given in a separate document.

The SUC has plans to use the money raised to construct a health post in Addis Ababa for use by the people living with HIV/AIDS. This arrangement would, on a continuous basis, demonstrate the commitment of the United Nations and its staff in Addis Ababa to help fight against HIV/AIDs. It will also serve as a showcase where the UN staff in Addis Ababa will have translated into action some of the resolutions and agreements made in conferences on the subject.

### IV.b The Clinic

The staff had raised many complaints about the services and the management of the clinic. These complaints were brought to the attention of the Inter-Agency Committee on the Services of the Clinic. The Committee then decided to verify the complaints through a survey.

The SUC has greatly contributed to the preparation of a questionnaire for the survey that was conducted in collaboration with

the members of the Inter-Agency Committee on the Services of the Clinic. About a hundred questionnaires were duly completed and returned to the Union Office. Unfortunately, because of the slow move of the Inter-Agency Committee, the questionnaires are yet to be analysed. We are currently negotiating with Management on who and how to analyze the questionnaires. The SUC believes that the findings and recommendations from the analysis of the survey questionnaires would contribute to the improvement of the services and management of the Clinic.

#### IV.c Recreation Center

The SUC negotiated with Management and secured two blocks for a gymnasium in the barracks. Moreover, the SUC has secured an understanding from Management that the Management would contribute funds for the recreation center. A Committee was also formed to look into the equipment to be purchased and to identify other sources for the funds required. Unfortunately, the Committee is not moving forward fast enough, as expected.

#### **v. Promoting information flow and transparency**

With a view to promoting transparency, the SUC created a Website in the ECA Intranet to enable the staff and the SUC to exchange information, opinions, observations and comments. Suggestion boxes were also placed at different locations. Unfortunately, not many staff used these facilities. The ECA Newsletter also has a four-page column to print SUC and staff affairs. In addition, the SUC has been using Flashes to disseminate information to staff, as and when they became available. Furthermore, the SUC in collaboration with Management convened the Briefing on Human Resources Management in October 2000. The SUC also used the staff gathering called by the Executive Secretary to deliver his End of Year Statement to bring to light a number of staff concerns. The latter two forums enabled both the staff and the Management to exchange views about staff matters and the interests of the Commission.

#### **Conclusions**

The SUC believes that it has accomplished a number of tasks to the satisfaction of its members. In accomplishing these tasks, it showed accountability and demonstrated values and competence. There were also constructive staff-management consultations and relations. This strategy helped both parties to negotiate on issues of mutual interests and provide for input and feedback to create a ground for

ownership. Because our system of presenting our work programme has a provision for checks and balances, you can easily judge our claims.

Once again, though relations with Management are good, there are some offices in the management machinery that have not been providing the required support and cooperation to the SUC. The lack of positive attitude, support and cooperation has been an obstacle to the work of the SUC. We have appraised the Executive Secretary of the situation and we are confident that the situation will improve.

One issue we would like the members of the Staff Union to appreciate is that there is the need for improving their active participation in the activities of the SUC. Without the staff participation, there is only little that the SUC can do.

Thank you for your kind attention.