Item 77: Review of Salary Scales of the Professional and Higher Categories of the International Civil Service

Statement made by Mr. ~~Stewart~~ Stuart Hemsley in Fifth Committee on November 2, 1965

The reasons for the recommendations of the International Civil Service Advisory Board are fully set forth in its report (A/5918/Add. 1). The proposals rest mainly on the fact that since 1960 in all except one of the national public services examined, there have been appreciable increases in real income. It is implicit in the report of the 1956 inter-governmental salary review committee, and in the reports of earlier committees, that the movement of national public service salaries provides a criterion which is more acceptable to member states than some of the other criteria which have from time to time been suggested.

The Board observes, however (para.76 of its report), that there has never been a thorough examination to see whether the job comparison between United Nations grades and United States Civil Service Grades used in this and earlier salary reviews are correct. My delegation believes that such an examination should be undertaken.

More generally, the Board draws attention to certain apparently anomalous results produced by the present system and therefore suggests a re-examination of basic principles. The Secretary-General and his colleagues on the Administrative Committee on Co-ordination (ACC) believe that the anomalies are accidental consequences of the method chosen to solve many complex problems which do not arise in national systems. Other committees have found that it is difficult to remove one set of anomalies without creating other and possibly worse difficulties. We do, however, agree with the statement of the representative of the United Kingdom, when he was commenting on the close inter-relationship between salary levels and cost-of-living, that it is questionable whether it is justifiable to take New York salary levels and apply them in blanket form to Geneva. This practice should form part of the proposed review.

With claims on resources rising generally in all fields of United Nations activity, and bearing in mind the critical financial position of the United Nations, proposals for substantial increases such as in this instance must necessarily receive most careful scrutiny.

At the same time the Canadian Delegation is generally sympathetic to the broad aim of ensuring that a high calibre of staff is obtained for the United Nations. Whether the point has been reached where the salaries being offered by the United Nations are obstructing this general objective is difficult to say. It is a fact, however, that salaries for comparable types of work have been increased in the national services of several states since 1960 while those in the United Nations have not. Hence on this basis we are prepared to accept the Board's conclusion that an adjustment in

salary scales in necessary. The difficulty lies in being able to judge whether the increases proposed lean on the generous side or are not generous enough. Even ICSAB seems to have some doubts since it notes that a comparison of United Nations positions with similar positions in the United States Civil Service has not been made.

One important criterion is an organization's ability to recruit and retain staff. This consideration has now, however been commented upon to any great extent in the Board's report. More particularly, it would be helpful to know at what levels and in what fields difficulties are being experienced. We agree with the Board's observation that it is an over-simplification to imagine that so long as organizations can recruit all the staff they need, salaries need never be adjusted; or conversely, that if they cannot recruit staff, salaries must be increased. It would be unduly expensive to raise salary levels to the point where the organizations had no recruitment difficulties, if indeed these difficulties could be overcome by money alone, which is far from certain.

Basically, Mr. Chairman, our position is that we fully endorse the intention of ICSAB to review the principles which form the basis for the remuneration of the United Nations International Civil Service, but in the meantime the United Nations staff should not be penalized. As the question of salary revision has been carefully considered by an impartial and competent body we believe that its recommendations should be accepted.