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UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE UNITED NATIONS

April 9, 2026

Laura Johnson
Ian Richards
UNOG Staff Union

Dear Ms. Johnson and Mr. Richards,

I am writing regarding the UNOG Staff Union broadcast of 7 January 2026, “Important General Assembly decisions that affect you.”

The United States welcomes serious and honest discussion of the common system and, in advance of the eightieth main session of the Fifth Committee, engaged transparently with staff federations, the International Civil Service Commission, and the ICSC Secretariat regarding its position on a range of compensation issues. At the same time, we are concerned that the 7 January broadcast contains several statements that are misleading, incomplete, or inaccurate in their description of discussions within and decisions taken by the General Assembly during the eightieth session.

Most importantly, the broadcast repeatedly conflates proposals advanced by individual delegations, issues under review by the Commission, and decisions adopted by the General Assembly. These are not the same things, and failing to differentiate these risks giving staff a distorted picture of what occurred during the Fifth Committee negotiations.

For example, the broadcast states that the General Assembly discussed a proposal “to cut salaries immediately by up to 10 percent.” This is not accurate. No delegation proposed an immediate across-the-board salary cut of that kind, and no such proposal was considered by the Fifth Committee. Rather, the United States proposed that, as part of the ongoing comprehensive review, the Commission identify recommendations and specific proposals capable of achieving a 15 percent cost-savings target relative to 2024 levels through the rationalization, consolidation, and retargeting of allowances and benefits, with protections for lower-graded staff and staff serving at hardship duty stations. The United States also proposed that the Commission revisit the margin range and desirable midpoint through the established intergovernmental process. These proposals concerned phased reform through the Commission and the General Assembly, not an immediate salary cut.

Similarly, the broadcast states that UN pay is “well below pay levels for equivalent foreign postings” in the U.S. federal civil service and several other institutions. As you are aware, the relevant comparator under the Noblemaire principle is not the EEAS, OECD, World Bank, or NATO, but the highest-paid national civil service, historically, and currently, the United States federal civil service. The Commission’s own methodology has consistently shown UN net

remuneration to remain well above the U.S. comparator within the established margin framework.

The broadcast's discussion of Geneva compensation is also incomplete and misleading. Its reference to U.S. Living Quarters Allowance presents one housing-related allowance in isolation and incorrectly suggests that no such element exists in the UN system. Although Noblemaire does not require that each individual U.S. civil service allowance be replicated in the UN compensation system, in this instance there is a corresponding UN element: rental subsidy, for which eligible Geneva-based UN staff may qualify. More broadly, UN staff and U.S. federal civil service personnel are compensated through differently structured packages, including distinct salary and allowance frameworks. Selective reference to a single element does not fully or accurately capture those differences.

The same concerns apply to the broadcast's discussion of pensions. The General Assembly requested an assessment of options to improve the cost-effectiveness and long-term sustainability of the pension scheme, including defined contribution and hybrid designs, alongside possible adjustments within the existing scheme. That is a request for analysis, not a decision to alter the current pension structure. Characterizing that request as having come "out of the blue" and suggesting that "bankers get richer" is not a neutral nor a constructive summary of intergovernmental action. To put it mildly, your misleading, and gratuitous, statement is not acceptable.

Member States have both the authority and the responsibility to examine compensation, benefits, and pension costs, and the General Assembly is fully entitled to provide policy guidance to the Commission on issues including cost containment, reform priorities, and options for review. Staff deserve clear explanations of what was proposed, what was debated, and what was ultimately adopted.

We therefore ask that future Staff Union communications on these matters avoid characterizations that misstate the positions of delegations or the actions of the General Assembly.

Sincerely,



Ambassador Jeff Bartos
Representative for UN Management and Reform
United States Mission to the United Nations