



## UNITED NATIONS STAFF UNIONS

### Position on Standards of Air Travel, A/73/705

Staff unions were not consulted on the Secretary-General's proposal for the single threshold. Nevertheless, given that this is being considered by the General Assembly, staff unions have the following observations:

- Travel should be for a justifiable purpose and where no alternative, such as video-conferencing or use of a representative office is available or practical. Time on mission and size of delegation should be appropriate to the task and no more.
- There is no justification for the use of first class. There needs to be stronger controls in this regard. It should be noted that first class isn't available to staff.
- A single threshold allows for a more simple travel booking system, replacing travel agents with self-ticketing. This in turn removes agency fees of up to \$100 a ticket.
- Long haul economy travel adds rest days at the end of each journey, with wages and opportunity costs to be factored in. A staff member arriving on mission location by economy on Monday would start work on Tuesday. A staff member travelling business can work during the flight and also be operational within four hours of arrival. For typical four to five day missions this changes the financial equation.
- In comparing with external practices it is important to note that the EU External Action Service has a threshold of four hours, while US Government practice of favouring the three national airlines means upgrades are common.
- A significant amount of travel is related to extra-budgetary funded projects. Those projects may require extensive and repeated travel to arduous and distant locations across multiple time zones. Staff welfare is an important consideration. The decision to travel is made by the organization to meet its mandates in an efficient and effective manner, not by the staff member who will be spending time away from loved ones.
- The same travel rules should apply to all staff regardless of grade so they can all arrive mentally sharp and able to deliver to their fullest extent, whether a a weapons-carrying G-4 security officer, a P-4 mission team leader or a FS-6 logistics officer.

We therefore support a single threshold, although of 9 hours, elimination of first class, measures to encourage greater use of advance purchase and self-ticketing, an audit of video-conferencing versus travelling, and stronger controls on delegation size.