

We, the undersigned, believe that the United Nations and its agencies need to urgently address the status of unpaid interns within their organisations.

We call on the UN Secretariat to place the issue of internships on the agenda for the next Fifth Committee meeting later this year. We urge Ban Ki Moon and the UN Secretariat to publicly call on states to support calls for a living stipend for all UN interns.

The current lack of remuneration clearly discriminates against people who do not come from wealthy backgrounds or developed countries. This trend was clearly identified in the 2012 UN Joint Inspection Unit report which found that, although citizens from developed countries make up just 15% of the world's population, they constitute 59% of the UN internship intake. The UN recently identified inequality as a key issue to address for the new Sustainable Development Goals and it ought to be addressing this issue within its own organisation as well by making the internships program accessible to all.

Furthermore although interns now make up almost 10% of UN staff, they are unable to join the unions or enjoy many of the similar benefits of those they work alongside. UN staff are often placed in difficult positions whereby moral responsibility for intern welfare ends up being placed on their shoulders because the organisation itself is not providing any support for interns. Ensuring that interns are provided with a living stipend would address this issue.

The International Labour Organisation's intern policy demonstrates a better alternative to the current system. A living stipend, adjusted to location, and the ability to join the staff union are key aspects of the ILO policy which should be adopted across the UN and its agencies. The cost of implementing such a stipend would likely be around \$25 million per year: – less than 0.3% of the UN annual budget.

While there has been debate over whether it is the UN Secretariat or Member-States who should lead the change on this issue, it is clear that the UN Secretariat could be doing more. Although Member-States have the ultimate say on budget issues, the UN Secretariat often makes suggestions to Fifth Committee meetings where this issue could be discussed. UN OHCHR Special Expert Alfred de Zayas stated recently that “since we rely on the support of interns, it is in our own interest to appeal to the Fifth Committee to ensure there is financing for interns.” Member-States are much more likely to consider a change if the demand comes from the UN Secretariat as well as intern organisations.

While intern groups are busy lobbying Member-States to push for change, we consider it imperative that an intern stipend be publicly supported and championed by the UN Secretariat themselves. The time is now for the UN to live up to its own values by making its internships program an equal opportunity for all.