REPORT OF THE UNOG STAFF COORDINATING COUNCIL
CONSULTATIONS WITH THE STAFF OF OHCHR ON THE CHANGE INITIATIVE

Executive summary

This a report of consultations with OHCHR staff on the Change Initiative. It was undertaken as part of the mandate of the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council.

This is the final report of the findings, further to additional comments received from staff, including those who were not able to attend the meetings or are outside Geneva.

The main findings so far regarding the Change Initiative:

- A need for clear rationale, including on the purpose of the hubs, and their relation to other functions and field offices, and regarding the merging of sections.
- Clarity required about how the initiative relates to different stages of budget approval.
- Questions about the choice of posts to be moved, concerns about the strong focus on one division and concerns about the impact on specialized functions as well as on support services and General Service staff.
- A feeling of stress and reform fatigue among staff with this process coming so soon after the reprioritization/budget restructuring exercise of late 2014.
- A desire for an open and transparent lateral reassignment system, and significant support for the changes to take place in parallel with the UN mobility policy entering into force in 2016 so as to ensure broader career opportunities for staff.
- Concerns on how the Initiative could impact gender and geographic balance.

In response to these concerns the Council makes a number of draft conclusions and options with regards to:

- transparency and information sharing;
- sequencing of changes;
- the movement of staff;
- policy issues connected to staff mobility; and
- General Service staff.

It is hoped that the findings of this report will enable a more staff-focused implementation of the Change Initiative, building on the strengths, expectations and hopes of staff.
Background

The High Commissioner for Human Rights has announced a Change Initiative that will entail an important restructuring of operations, especially in the field, and a reshaping of its activities. These changes come at a critical time for a strategic, much appreciated and important UN department.

In line with a number of UN policies, including Staff Rule 8.1, ST/SGB/274, ST/SGB/172, the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council is mandated to be consulted on all issues affecting the welfare of staff with UNOG contracts, including staff at OHCHR in Geneva and other locations. This includes on matters of restructuring.

As part of its mandate, and following the announcement of the Change Initiative by the High Commissioner, the Council held meetings in the course of June and July 2015 with the following divisions and services in Geneva: RRDD, PSMS, HRTD, HRCMD, FOTCD and EDM. The meetings were also attended by a member of the OHCHR Staff Committee. In addition, the Council held a separate meeting with a member of the Staff Mobility Group.

These consultations with staff were a response by the Council to the needs of staff to speak frankly in smaller and more focused settings, and to address topics of the restructuring in greater detail. The meetings with staff focused on their hopes, expectations and concerns relating to the Change Initiative. Staff were encouraged to speak freely and assured that their interventions would not be attributed. The discussions also took place in the wider context of changes at the United Nations on which the Council is being consulted, including the activation of the Polnet/Peacenet job network in the mobility programme as of January 2016 and changes related to the implementation of Umoja and the resultant development of the Global Service Delivery Model.

What follows is the report of these discussions categorized by issue.

We take this opportunity to thank the staff of the various divisions and services for attending as well as to thank their management teams for having released colleagues and facilitated the logistics, and staff from OHCHR field presences for forwarding comments on the draft report, as well as thoughts on the Change Management Initiative.
1- Rationale behind the restructuring

It was felt by many staff that the rationale of the restructuring needed to be better explained as well as the vision informing it. In later meetings, staff acknowledged the newsletters and broadcasts on the topic, but it was felt that despite these, the basic premise and key objectives required greater clarity, and that this would help them understand and contribute to the initiative more positively.

Interventions were also made with regards to the rationale behind the integration of the Special Procedures Branch into the Division on Research and Right to Development, especially given the past experience that had led to the earlier separation of the two entities for various reasons.

It appeared that consultants from UNDP and other funds and programmes had led the OHCHR exercise. Staff felt that the brief and ad hoc consultations with staff were not very meaningful, and did not facilitate an understanding by the consultants on the nature of OHCHR work, at headquarters or in the field presences.

There were also concerns raised about the effectiveness of the Office following the proposed restructuring, whether this had been comprehensively considered and if an assessment of the future consequences and impact on the Office and its human rights mandate had taken place.

It was also not clear what the mandate and purpose of the regional hubs would be, and how the change would impact the role, efficacy and the DNA of the Office as a whole. There were numerous questions, including:

- Would the hubs accommodate FOTCD posts only or would they also reflect greater field presence of all OHCHR operations?
- Would they be comprised of desk officer/geographic posts only, or would they reflect the communications, administrative and resource mobilization functions as well?
- How would the change impact the current regional and country office structure?
- Would the hubs replace the regional offices?
- How would this be phased or implemented?
- If the hubs would not replace existing regional offices, how would their roles, mandate and coverage differ?
- Wasn’t there a risk of significant duplication?
- Is there a Plan B if the Office is unable to secure approval and sufficient funds for the initiative?
• Would it be more useful to choose a pilot case of a hub to pilot it first, before embarking on the overall implementation?

2- Posts to be moved

Questions were raised with regard to the decision and selection of posts being moved to the hubs:
• How and on what basis were posts being identified for movement to the hubs or retention at headquarters?
• What matrix was being used to compare selected posts to the goals of the restructuring?

It was also felt that the onus to provide posts (and staff) for the hubs should not lay on only one division.

Concerns were also raised on how the movement of posts to the hubs would impact existing field offices and staff there, including local staff, and the short timelines. Thought should also be given to the possible movement of regional office staff to move on lateral transfers, especially in the cases where hubs might replace/be created in the same location as existing regional offices.

In addition, given that it appeared that posts would be moving to the field, concerns were raised with regard to how these would affect related support services (assistants, programme management and support services) at headquarters. How were the job descriptions/vacancies for the posts in the hubs and those at headquarters being devised?

Further concerns were expressed about possibilities that new post requirements may not match the skills and experiences of the current staff, especially given the lack of advance notice and training to acquire those, and this would then have impact on serving OHCHR staff.

3- Staff mobility group

Questions were raised by staff on the mandate, composition and selection process for the staff mobility group. There were also questions about their exact role in the process; selection of posts and/or identification of individuals, and on what basis or criteria.
4- General Service staff

As GS staff (locally recruited) cannot be moved with their posts from Geneva, and given the low GS vacancy rate at OHCHR, serious concerns were raised about how affected colleagues could be accommodated. There were also concerns raised about GS staff in regional offices which may be closed.

5- Lateral moves

Staff believed lessons needed to be learned from the lateral move process that took place during the 2014 budget reprioritization exercise. It was felt that this restructuring needed to be more open, considered and transparent and better able to accommodate career aspirations and interests, while meeting the important functional needs of the Office as a whole.

Concerns were also raised that this process coming so soon after the 2014 budget-related lateral move process, created additional stress for staff and reform fatigue.

It was felt that posts created in the field and elsewhere as a result of the restructuring should be published to all staff, giving all staff a chance to express interest. Preference should be given to the current post owner, but the onus should not necessarily be on the staff member affected by the post identification to have to move.

In this connection it was felt that the criteria ostensibly being developed for who would move or not move were not the right approach. These criteria were neither effectively communicated nor clear, and there was concern about whether they were grounded in, and consistent with, the Staff Regulations and Rules. More information about the lateral transfer criteria was required, and there were also concerns about the confidentiality of the selection and reassignment procedure.

Further, it was felt by many that the mobility policy offered an opportunity for staff to explore wider horizons and would allow an opportunity for staff reaching their post incumbency limits (7 years in Geneva, down to 2 years in the toughest locations) to enter the pool (Polnet/Peacenet).

A key concern was the forthcoming rule that staff would need to stay on a post for two years before being able to apply for a new post. Therefore staff may not wish to move under the Change Initiative in the event that other posts options might become available during the next
two mobility cycles. It was clear that most staff did not understand the need for the exercise to be concluded prior to the entry in force of the new mobility policy (Polnet/Peacenet).

6- **Vertical moves**

The restructuring will involve the creation of new posts for which there might not be sufficient onboard staff at the same level, such as D-1 heads of hubs. It was raised that it would be important to ensure the open and competitive nature of the selection process.

7- **Career development at the junior level**

Concerns were raised that while the restructuring might facilitate opening of posts at the P-5 level, it would likely not address the bottleneck of posts at the P-2 level. Given that recent years have seen regularizations and reassignments for budgetary purposes, there have been very limited vacancies at the P-3 level for entry-level colleagues.

8- **Gender balance and geographic diversity**

In several meetings, the need to ensure gender balance and geographic diversity during the identification and selection process of the restructuring both at headquarters and in the various field presences was raised. It was noted that the restructuring could also provide an opportunity to address these issues, where possible. Concerns were raised with regard to ensuring that regional hubs also be geographically diverse, ensuring that certain colleagues from geographic areas would not necessarily be assigned to hubs in that geographic region.

The hubs could prove an opportunity for the office to diversify further and ensure gender balance and representation, especially for women at levels of P-5 and above.

It would also be important to also assess the “balance” which would remain at headquarters, following planned deployments.
Conclusions and options

The meetings held with OHCHR colleagues have been extremely valuable. The work of the office is unique, appreciated and closely followed across the UN system. The human rights work is important, as part of the UN Secretariat, as in the world.

Addressing staff concerns and managing the change in a manner that provides opportunities for staff, while minimizing stress, will benefit the office itself. While fatigue, apprehension and uncertainty regarding aspects of the Change Initiative were noted, staff remained committed to the values of the organization and the crucial human rights work that the OHCHR undertakes through various functions and in different places around the world. Across the board, the issues raised reflected concerns with the process of the management initiative, as much as its rationale and possible outcomes. The principles of equality and non-discrimination, transparency and due process must be incorporated in the restructuring.

The Council would like to offer some conclusions and possible options that will hopefully provide guidance on how the change can best be managed from a staff and organizational perspective:

a) Transparency and information sharing

Staff need to receive clear and substantial information concerning each stage of the implementation of the Initiative, on a timely basis. They should be provided with meaningful and regular opportunities to provide feedback and present “grassroots” staff options and solutions.

b) Sequencing

Based on concerns raised by staff, it would appear that a more optimal sequence for the Initiative would be to determine in the following order:

- the purpose, composition and functions of the regional hubs;
- the budget implications;
- the total impact on posts;
- the impact on staff by grade, sex, geographic region, and function (including specialized functions); and then
- the best way to enable reassignments of staff as necessary (bearing in mind gender and geographic diversity).
c) Movement of staff

Once the implications on staff are fully known, an open and transparent, rather than an individual-by-individual basis consideration, should take place. All staff should have the opportunity to participate in field opportunities regardless of their division. The process could be managed by Human Resources with a possible oversight mechanism.

As mentioned by staff, the implementation of the Peacenet job network group in the UN mobility scheme should be seen positively. There is a strong interest in the career opportunities that might arise. Further the mobility policy allows lateral reassignments in the case of restructuring exercises, such as the Change Initiative, to be ring-fenced, with the head of department retaining delegation of authority. There is therefore no need to complete the Initiative before the entry into force of the UN mobility policy.

d) Policy issues connected to staff mobility

Staff raised concerns about lack of clarity on the policies and approaches being taken as part of the Initiative. To this end it is worth noting that the development of the UN mobility policy has led to a substantive body of policy being created on issues such as:

- transparency in the selection process and related due process;
- due process for dealing with constraints to geographic mobility or mobility to certain locations on grounds such as gender, family circumstances, sexuality and health issues;
- due process and mitigation of consequences for staff whose posts are modified or abolished;
- possible consideration of telecommuting arrangements for families/couples in different locations.

These policy tools, developed through extensive staff-management consultations and in certain cases stress-tested through different scenarios and widely consulted across the organization and with member states could serve as a starting point.
e) General service staff

Concerns remain about the situation of GS staff on posts to be moved from Geneva, given the very low vacancy rate. It had been suggested that other departments in Geneva might be able to absorb affected colleagues. However, the Council is aware that other departments are making their own budget cuts with further cuts expected in administrative services as a result of the implementation of Umoja. More details would be appreciated, especially on how an equitable approach could be ensured within all UN Secretariat Offices in Geneva.

UNOG Staff Coordinating Council
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