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Geneva, 24 January 2020

Dear Director-General,

I am writing to you in your capacity of the owner of the Strategic Heritage Plan.

As you know, this 800-million-dollar-project will dramatically change the working environment of staff who work in buildings at the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG). These staff have on many occasions expressed their strong concerns regarding the hot-desking option that is being planned for implementation in the H building currently under construction, not because they are resistant to change, but because they are concerned about the impact of such an option on their capacity to work efficiently.

The literature regarding hot-desking clearly mentions that such a work space has a negative impact on the level of performance of employees, on teamwork and on staff well-being. These considerations are critical at a time when the Organization is challenged in its ability to deliver on its global mandates. The staff of the Organization are its key asset.

While we cannot ask you to change the future configuration of the work space in building H which you inherited as a decision taken by your predecessor, we would like to draw your attention to the lack of proper consultation with staff representatives and staff regarding the planned work environment.

Despite the fact that a joint staff-management Working group was set up a couple of years ago on the SHP project, the Working group only seems to meet when staff representatives insist on holding a meeting. Whenever we do meet, we are placed in front of a "fait accompli" in the sense that we are only informed about decisions that have already been taken, despite prior assurances given to us that we would be consulted on issues pertaining to staff well-being. Whenever we express our concerns or make alternative solutions or proposals, the answer systematically received is that it is too late to make any amendments as they would involve additional costs.

Recent examples concern the choice of furniture and the eating area in the H building. We were invited to the mock-up session to assess the furniture selected from three different vendors. We were astonished to learn that our views were not sought beforehand regarding the type of desks, the small lockers and the height of the separation panels. Similarly, we were astonished to learn that the H building, which is due to host 700 staff members, has a space of only 30 square meters for a "grab and go" coffee-sandwich bar and with only seating for 65. We were also astonished to learn that the 6th floor, which has a capacity to host 200 staff members, has yet to attract a tenant despite many organizations having been offered the space, putting into question the very need for hot-desking.

This clearly illustrates that staff who are the future users have been excluded from the decision-making process on the future space they will occupy, and on matters that directly affect their well-being and welfare.

Ms Tatiana Valovaya
UNOG Director-General

CC : Mr David Chikvaidze, Chef de Cabinet
Mr Clemens Adams, Director of Administration
Mr David Mccuaig

We hope that you will appreciate that we simply cannot accept that the future work space of UNOG staff is decided by a team that appears from our meetings to have limited knowledge or understanding of the UN and its working methods. We believe that Central Support Services, which will be in charge of the maintenance of the renovated buildings, needs to be fully included in the decision-making process. But most importantly, UNOG staff should have a say on their future work space.

We recently learned about the creation of a transition team within the Division of Administration. While we still fail to understand the objectives of such a team, we are looking forward to seeing it produce tangible results that serve the interests of staff.

Finally, we respectfully call on you to intervene to establish a proper mechanism of consultation with staff representatives, so that staff views are properly taken into account before important decisions are made.

UN staff in Geneva look forward to receiving a positive reply.



Prisca Chaoui
Executive Secretary