



36th UNOG Staff Coordinating Council 36^{ème} Conseil de coordination du personnel de l'ONUG

Minutes of the 7th meeting

held on 27 September 2018 at 1 p.m. in room Concordia 5

Council members present: ALMARIO Francis, APOSTOLOV Mario, BALD Ian, BALY Mohamed Chiraz, CHANTREL Dominique, CHAOUI Prisca, DUPARC Philippe, FUNCK Thomaz Samuel, GAZIYEV Jamshid, JAMES Elizabeth, KALOTAY Kalman, MEYER Olivier, PECK ARIF Catherine, RICHARDS Ian, SMITH Bradford, STANOVIC Marko, TAPORAIE Amos, TOUIHRI Mohssen.

Council members absent: ADELISE Dominique, EL GARAH Samira, KELLY Paul, NWABUOGU Gloria, POPA Gabriela, ROUAI Slim, RUHANA-MUKAMUSONI Angelique.

The meeting started at 1.10 p.m.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The draft agenda was adopted with changes as reflected below.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 6th meeting

The minutes of the 6th meeting were adopted without changes as recorded in the Council secretariat.

3. Report of the Executive Bureau

The EB reported on its activities since the previous Council meeting, notably on the following subjects:

(1) Education grant: effects were being noted since it was reduced; a reply is expected from the Private Schools Association on how they could improve schools' billing practices in benefit of international staff. (2) UN Special lawsuit: the Council and WHO SA attended a hearing with the plaintiff before a conciliation judge, at which the latter asked the plaintiff to provide solid proof of his claim within a month. (3) SHP: the working group had recently met and minutes would be circulated to Council members once available; the fitness/club space was removed from the SHP project, which was deeply regretted; official information from the SHP team was not being shared with staff at large nor was the Council being kept briefed, the EB had agreed to put pressure on the Administration so that staff at large are included in the discussions. (4) Review of rules and regulations: a large amount of ST/AIs and SGBs were being modified by the Organisation including on staff selection; a staff townhall had been held to inform gather feedback from staff; an Ad-Hoc SMC would discuss the way consultations were taking place; the staff side would draft a paper on staff selection. (5) Closing of the Reference Unit: some jobs were expected to be lost, amongst which some staff were yet to be placed. (6) Geneva Group: it met the day before to discuss multiple issues, minutes would be circulated once ready. (7) Park benches: the proposal to purchase new/better park benches for staff enjoyment was moving forward and it would be presented to the Council plenary for approval once finalised.

A discussion followed. A suggestion was raised to look into the outcome of the DG's working group on career development and how it fitted into staff selection changes, and also to look into deficiencies in the application of the roster in job openings. An question was raised on the Council's strategy vis-à-vis planned terminations and how to engage Management to mitigate the impact and find acceptable solutions. Reference was made to a previous recruitment system whereby an initial period of time was reserved for internal applicants which could be beneficial to go back to. Another question was raised about potential budget cuts in the new year.

It was recalled that a discussion on how the Council engaged downsizing was already held at its last meeting. It was noted that budget cuts seemed to be expected, and efforts were still being made to finalise the set-up of a WG on downsizing. Council members were welcome to send in comments on

how to fight cuts and abolition of posts.

It was said that the roster issue was being addressed in the paper on changes to staff selection being prepared by staff in the context of SMC and written assessments would be looked at, and that a career development working group was already set up under SMC whose report could be found in the last SMC report. It was added that the Council should see with Management any positions to be cut, possibly looking into mitigating measures through normal attrition of posts, and then deliberate at a dedicated meeting.

4. Report of the Finance Commission

The Council was informed that the UN Beach Club was dissolved, therefore their assets would be transferred to the Council as per their statutes. This would not have any effect on the Council books as the proposal was to subsequently transfer the integrity of the assets to the new association UN Port, of which the Council is co-owner with the Administration.

A question was raised inquiring about “No pay cut campaign” expenditures. The latest accounts circulated were recalled, which placed said expenditures at approx. CHF 15'000 as of August 2018.

Mr. Almario left the meeting at this point.

5. CCISUA

The Council was informed that the CCISUA mid-term review would take place in New York during the week of 12 November, plus lobbying efforts during the week before. The EB recommended that Mr. Bali and Mr. Richards attend during both weeks, and that Ms. Chaoui attend during the week of the 12th (CCISUA mid-term). The Council approved the EB's recommendation.

6. OCHA restructuring

It was brought to the Council's attention that OCHA was in the process of attempting its 3rd (arguably 4th) restructuring, which was not being called as such by OCHA Management since they were moving positions to the field and asking for “efficiency gains” whilst being vague on this. It was said that contact had been established with OCHA staff in Geneva and other duty stations, and that a working group on downsizing would be requested – something that had proven useful and effective the last time – to ensure rules on the matter be duly followed and avoid subjective/unfair treatment.

It was mentioned that there was a high risk for OCHA staff to be treated unfairly in the above context because it was not being called “downsizing”, and that the key to ensuring it fell into place correctly was to form a joint group with Management or at least ensure the presence of a staff representative in the process to provide reassurance and neutrality. It was asked whether OCHA Management had denied the presence of a staff rep, which was said not to be the case, but that it was in any case important to ensure a staff rep's presence and it was agreed to exert pressure to that effect.

The OHCHR experience was recalled whereby a working group with staff representation had been put in place to match staff in Geneva against posts in the field with staff representation, which was known to have worked out well; a similar experience could be sought in OCHA's particular situation. It was agreed that a working group on downsizing at OCHA should be established as soon as possible, as cuts were possibly to be expected for the next budget cycle.

7. Length of fixed-term contracts across departments

The Council recalled the disparity/subjectivity in the application of fixed-term contract renewal across various departments (i.e. SSS, DCM) whilst there was a clear guideline in the staff rules. It was mentioned that the issue had been raised at the last JNC meeting and that the Council was still awaiting a reply; more details would continue to be gathered.

It was further raised that it seemed different departments were interpreting the rights of managers in different ways and the subjectivity in contract renewals used as a tool by Management to control staff. Council members were welcome to submit comments and experiences. Reference was made to the Reference Unit's case which began with reductions in contract renewal times until it was declared to be closed down. OCHA's case was also mentioned, where since the year before all contract extensions were given only until the end of year and that it relied too much on temporary contracts. It was suggested to create a working group monitoring renewals and new contracts.

8. GSDM

It was noted that lobbying efforts concerning GSDM would be undertaken in New York in the upcoming mission, and that the Administration alleged it was doing everything in its power to avoid impact on staff.

9. UN Beach Club inventory

It was recalled that, as per the Council's recommendation, an independent inventory of UN Beach Club assets was completed. The Council was informed that the UN Beach Club had been dissolved and that all its assets would be transferred to the Council as per the Club's statutes, to be subsequently transferred to the new association UN Port.

A discussion followed on the structure on the UN Beach Club (which did not belong to the Council) and reference was made to its origins and how it was recently managed, noting governance issues throughout the years. These issues had led to the creation of an interim committee, following a change in statutes comprised by two staff representatives and two Administration representatives. Later on UNOG decided to create a new association with a new governance structure: UN Port, which is co-owned by the Council and the Administration, whilst the former UN Beach Club – as per its statutes – was dissolved. It was clarified that UN Port was an association under Swiss law, and that the funds it made (as was the case with the previous association) belonged to it and yearly external audits were provided for in its statutes. Also, that the UN Port Committee (comprised by staff and Administration reps) was the managing body of the association and that the Administration and the Council acted as oversight bodies.

It was noted that the assets to be received from the dissolved UN Beach Club were valued at approx. CHF 126'268.58, which the Council agreed to transfer to UN Port.

10. UN Special lawsuit

The item was discussed under item 3 above.

11. SHP

The item was discussed under item 3 above.

12. Mid-term review of the Council work programme

The Council was informed that the EB conducted a mid-term review of the work programme, where it noted that the Council was on track (except travel policy, which would be discussed under SMC).

On travel policy, an issue was raised concerning flight schedules arriving very early morning at a destination, where the system would not recognize the actual first night of DSA. It was recalled that expense claims could be submitted for refund.

Mr. Meyer left the meeting at this point.

13. Tribute to Kofi Annan

The Council recalled its email discussion about a proposal to pay tribute to Mr. Annan. Following a discussion, the Council agreed on the principle to pay tribute to Mr. Annan and to suggest the Administration to plant a tree on Palais grounds to honour his memory (costs to be borne by the Council).

14. Legal assistance request

The Council was informed that a request was received from a staff member for legal assistance to challenge a Pension Fund Board decision to refuse an entitlement; the details of the case were explained and it was noted that it was not the first case of its nature. The Council was further informed that the EB was of the view that the case was emblematic with effect for all staff, however it had deemed necessary to obtain a legal opinion on the winning prospect of the case before agreeing to cover the costs of legal assistance. The Council agreed with the EB's view and approved an expenditure of up to CHF 5'000 for a preliminary legal assessment of the case.

15. Any other business

Travel Policy. The issue was raised of how difficult it was to obtain refunds in expense claims upon returning from mission, regretting applicable rules were thus not being followed. The Council's informative role was highlighted and regular information sessions encouraged (to cover issues such as that one). The idea of organizing a townhall was seconded in order to take stock of the situation. It was said other problematic issues included: the "midnight rule" not applied consistently; travel over week-end not converted into compensatory time off; the "most direct - least expensive route" which often resulted in problems for staff members and did not take into account the changed business model of airlines; forcing travel through particular countries with restrictions for certain nationalities. The importance of informing staff of the policy and raising awareness on entitlements was highlighted. The Council agreed to hold a townhall on the issue in the near future.

UN Special lawsuit. The Council recalled the background and details of the case.

SAFI. A proposal was raised to discuss and put to a vote whether the Council-owned SAFI shop – which operates under Swiss legal and fiscal jurisdiction – should continue paying income taxes to the Swiss fiscal authorities. Mr. Stanovic felt that this subject should be put on the agenda of a future Council meeting, discussed and voted on.

The meeting ended at 2:45 p.m.