



## Federation Summary of the HLCM Meeting on Future of Work

*Virtual Meeting, 29.9.2020*

### Introduction

In this session, the CEB discussed the *interim report of the task force on future of work*, which comprised proposals in three main areas, namely

- Remote Working
- Agile Contract Modalities
- Enabling Technologies

The federations, despite multiple requests, have not been invited to participate in the working group and have only received the interim report and the related discussion paper on September 16, 2020. The scope of the HLCM meeting was to facilitate discussions, based on the discussion paper and to ask the members (i.e. management) to review and endorse the core elements.

The members (i.e. management) are of the joint view that the world of work will not be the same and that fundamental changes to the UN are required in order to attract a young workforce, allow for greater flexibility in their use, to create a new framework on teleworking and to overhaul the current approach to leadership and management, using a *people centered approach* and ensuring a *positive employee experience*.

Technology is seen as an enabler for change and IT selected ID projects, such as a common UN ID shall be implemented.

Concerning the contract modalities, the members are of the view that '*new and sustainable contracts for the UN system are needed*' and stated that a consultative and inclusive process in discussing the matter is required. They recognize that the staff federations are a major stakeholder, as is the ICSC.

### Federation Positions

#### UNISERV

UNISERV reminded the attendees that the CEB/HLCM had previously communicated that they were building trust through authenticity, dialogue, courage, transparency and accountability. The



federations jointly requested that the elected staff Federation representatives be part and considered key stakeholders of the Task Force on the future work. This was agreed verbally during the meeting and all three Federations followed this up in writing afterwards.

UNISERV and fellow federations raised concerns that the driving document for this session includes the lines, *“During discussions of the Task Force, a number of elements were identified that would need to be taken into consideration when developing the new model contract, be different to, and complementary to, existing contract modalities and applicable in different organizational contexts, and could progressively replace the contractual framework with one, flexible contractual modality for the future”*.

UNISERV reminded the HLCM that many of their members had previously been 300 Series / ALD staff members where allowances and entitlements were different or not applicable to them, the time served did not count towards ASHI. This short-term contract modality had been deemed a failure and was discontinued at the time.

The staff are vehemently against contractual status changes for its members purely due to this being perceived as the solution to more agile ways of work. This would create a two-tier staffing structure with members being remunerated differently. The HLCM stated that new “agile contractual framework” would be for new staff members only although this is not what the working document said, this still leads us to a two-tier system with a second class of staff.

We pointed out that our current regulations and practices are what restricts the ability to be a more agile workforce. The organization should allow for staff members to diverge, yet currently job descriptions and clearances are becoming so specific and narrowly focused that we are creating job specific silos that prevent the development of a multi skilled and therefore more agile workforce. This makes being agile less and less possible and staff less mobile, for instance in an emergency.

We have become so specialized with the restraints being too much. We need to be more generalized to allow the organization to utilize the skill sets already within the system.

UNISERV stated that the HLCM should review all systems and methods of work that cause restrictions to agility and not talk of new contract modalities that would likely reduce allowances and not promote agility. We were adamant that the current three contracts available, temporary, fixed term and continuing already allow for flexibility, although we noted the reduction in the issuance of continuing appointments. The reduction of bureaucracy and streamlining of recruitment processes and systems is what is needed to create agility in terms of hiring staff.

It was clear that some of the members were talking of budgets and the restraints thereof more so than agility.

It was further stated that one of the reasons staff feel restricted is the lack of portability of pensions in and out of the UN bodies and external workforce. This has always been an issue and should be looked at in conjunction with any other work of the Task Force.

It was requested that the HLCM explain exactly what an agile contract is and the complete reason why we need it and what specific problems it aims to redress.



This question remained unanswered.

#### CCISUA

In preparation of the meeting, CCISUA shared a position / comments document outlining their objection to the report in general and insisted on being a part in the working group. A resolution on *'future of work'*, was attached to the document.

The document was shared again during the meeting and CCISUA was requested to provide more information on the content.

CCISUA reiterated their objection to the report and thanked the HLCM for the clear commitment on the recognition of the federations as major stakeholder and their inclusion in the discussions, going forward.

CCISUA emphasized that any matters affecting the conditions of service of staff need to be discussed with the appropriate staff representation bodies as well as reminding the HLCM that any change project in the United Nations cannot be prescribed from the top but needs to be consulted with, implemented and lived by the organization's biggest asset, their staff. CCISUA further stated that it is very regrettable that no social dialog has taken place on these crucial matters and that it is unacceptable that the persons, who will be directly affected and are represented through their elected bodies, are not included.

Concerning the substance of the interim report, CCISUA questioned whether the core problem that the proposals try to fix, has been clearly defined. Given the information at hand, the original intent can only be reverse engineered and what can be extracted is

- the need to quickly onboard, deploy and offboard colleagues to serve across the globe,
- to cut costs;

CCISUA stated their concern with regards to the impacts of the proposals and reiterated that this discussion should have already taken place in the working group and that CCISUA could have contributed towards finding sensible solutions, however this opportunity was missed.

CCISUA stated concern in the potential risks stemming from the implementation, also potentially having negative effects on the major endeavours by the SG, for example gender balance and geographic diversity. Also, the unclear implications on the social security model as well as the pension fund was noted.



In closing, CCISUA reminded the members that each and every one of them had a work contract with the organisation and that through their proposals, unilateral changes would be forced on them as well. How would they feel if this were done without them being consulted prior.

## FICSA

FICSA made the following points during their brief intervention with reference to the Interim Report from the Task Force on the Future of Work as well as the discussion paper which was presented to the HLCM for consideration:

- FICSA thanked the Chair and subsequent speakers for committing to the process being fully consultative with all stakeholders going forward. At the same time, it was pointed out that the Federations had offered and requested involvement in the dialogue on this key topic on numerous occasions, going back to the HLCM in February and beyond.
- FICSA fully agreed with:
  - the need for a relevant, agile and flexible UN workforce
  - the need for flexible working arrangements that allow for genuine work-life balance. for all and noted that FICSA had raised this issue consistently over the years, particularly in the context of how this approach could contribute to gender parity across the organizations.
  - the need for transparency and accountability
  - the statement that the diversity of the UN workforce needs to be reflected in all policies and practices
  - the need for a "can do" attitude, and further noted in this context that the proposed "Leadership Commitments" cannot be just words, noting that the UN is very good at making such sweeping statements and it would be necessary going forward to demonstrate genuine commitment with transparency and accountability at all levels.
  - the need to speed up the discussions and actions on this and related issues.

FICSA further noted that, because the Federations were "late to the table", they were sorry to say that they had more questions than solutions about the process at this point. They stressed that this group was obligated to ensure that they properly reflect on the implications of anything agreed to for our staff, for our organizations, and for the people our mandates serve.

Specifically related to the proposals around new contractual modalities, FICSA asked:

- If the aim is to achieve agility - how does adding another layer to an already complicated system get us there
- If the aim is for a real and genuine One UN - then how does another contractual modality address the current barriers to that, citing the unresolved issue of the portability of After Service Health Insurance (AHSI) which had been discussed for many years and which remained a barrier to inter-agency mobility.



- If the aim is a modern workforce - how does another contractual modality address the archaic modalities and nomenclature, citing the reality that many GS staff are in effect office managers but are called “assistants” due to archaic rules.

FICSA agreed with the statements made by UNISERV that the issues facing the UN system are related to ways of working rather than contractual modalities. It was noted that many of the concerns raised in the discussion paper could be resolved within existing rules, regulations, policies and practices, based on the assumption that they would be consistently applied across the organizations. As an example, it was noted that flexible working arrangements has only been accepted, reluctantly, by many UN entities since COVID and that it was now necessary to refine and harmonize those practices.

FICSA noted with appreciation the comments from previous speakers which called for a “people-centered” approach. In this regard, FICSA’s active participation in the work of the UN Mental Health Implementation Board over the past years was noted, as well as the fact that although there had been a lot of positive press about working from home, it should also be noted that there were now more frequent reports about the negative impact on staff mental health. FICSA stressed that there should not be a knee-jerk reaction to policies around working from home and asked that full consideration be given to the full body of information coming out over time. FICSA further asked the HLCM to fully consider how to ensure the safety of staff and the retention of an independent international civil service.

In closing, FICSA asked that instead of trying to “keep pace” with the world on these issues that the HLCM should aim to lead the world where we can.

## Process

The discussion on the subject matters at the HLCM have not been closed and the working group will continue its deliberations. The following actions will be implemented as a result of the meeting.

- A *Model UN system framework* on teleworking will be presented to the HLCM in December 2020, taking into consideration the relevant points as outlined in the report,
- The WG will continue their work on the ‘future of work’ and report back at the next main session (Q1 2021),
- to advance on non-location contracts for international staff, recognizing that this is a longer-term project as detailed discussions with all major stakeholders are required and subsequent discussions will need to take place in the context of the ICSC.



The HLCM concluded their meeting in a closed session without the participation of staff federations. We are therefore not privy to the final decisions and additional action points from management's perspective. From the perspective of the Federations, the key follow-up point was to ensure full participation in dialogue going forward, as per the message below (see '*letter by federations*') which was sent immediately following the HLCM session.

## Letter by Federations as follow up to the Meeting



29. September 2020

Dear Madame Chair,

In reference to our meeting on 29. September 2020 in the context of the HLCM, we would like to thank you for the confirmation of the inclusion of the Staff Federations as major stakeholders in the discussions of the HLCM on the subject of *Future of Work*, going forward, including participation in the Task Force and the three related Work Streams.

We are looking forward to receiving the invitations and to fruitful deliberations.

Best regards

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Mr Stefan Brezina  
CCISUA President

Ms Tanya Quinn-Maguire  
FICSA President

Mr Stephen Towler  
UNISERV President