



38th UNOG Staff Coordinating Council 38^{ème} Conseil de coordination du personnel de l'ONUG

Minutes of the 2nd meeting

held on 6 April 2020 at 3.15 p.m. via MS Teams

Council members present: ALEKSANDROVA Anna; ALMARIO Francis; APOSTOLOV Mario; BALI Mohamed; CHANTREL Dominique; CHAOUI Prisca; DUPARC Philippe; GAZIYEV Jamshid; JACQUIOT Cédric; JAMES Elizabeth; KALOTAY Kalman; KELLY Paul; KHAN Anjum; LIN Dan; MEYER Olivier; MONNET Aminata; DAWADI Niraj; NOVIKOVA Alina; PECK ARIF Catherine; RICHARDS Ian; SHELDON JOHNSON Laura; SMITH Bradford;

Council members absent: BALD Iain; MUKAMUSONI Angelique Ruhana; STANOVIC Marko.

The meeting opened at 3:15 p.m.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 1st meeting

The minutes of the 1st meeting were adopted without changes as recorded in the Council secretariat.

3. Report of the (outgoing) Finance Commission

The outgoing Finance Commission informed the Council that the auditors had been contacted concerning the audit report of the 2018-2019 accounts, who replied they were still working on it but with delays considering the COVID-19 situation.

4. Election of the Finance Commission

The Council was informed that, as per the Regulations, the EB elected **Mohamed Bali** for the Finance Commission. Following their nominations, the Council elected the remaining three members:

Dominique Chantrel, Francis Almario, Anjum Khan.

5. Report of the Executive Bureau

The EB reported on its activities, except for matters covered under separate agenda items:

- **Equal pay:** The campaign was carried on until the Palais was put on lockdown due to COVID-19, and the last event took place in February which was well attended.

On the legal front, the SG presented a request to submit an amicus brief before the UNAT in the WMO case against the pay cut. The lawyer that had been engaged by the Council to assist in the pay cut campaign objected to the submission of the SG. The decision of the UNDT judges on the case of UN staff against the pay cut remained pending despite two reminders sent to the president of the judges.

It was noted that the ICSC had postponed the discussion of the new post-adjustment methodology (originally scheduled for Spring 2020) due to COVID-19. This meant it was unlikely to bring forward the cost-of-living survey from 2021 to 2020 (a measure that would have possibly settled the pay cut issue).

The contract with the external advisor for the equal pay campaign was temporarily suspended given the COVID-19 situation until the campaign can be resumed in full.

- **Pension Fund:** A Council broadcast was sent out informing staff of the resignation of the SG Representative for investments at the UNJSPF, noting that participant representatives had raised issues in October concerning investment practices. The latest information showed that the Fund had taken a loss of approx. USD 10 billion due to the COVID-19 situation, presumably in relation with the riskier investment

practices that participant representatives had warned about. A full and thorough analysis of the status of the Fund's investments was still awaited.

- **Safety and Security:** A meeting was held with the Director of the Department for Safety and Security who visited Geneva from New York, where staff representation raised issues concerning the Geneva Security and Safety Service, including working conditions.
- **UN Today:** Discussions with management remained ongoing concerning the wrongful distribution in the Palais of an external competitor to the UN staff magazine. It was agreed, given the COVID-19 situation, for UN Today to be issued as a digital edition in April and potentially May and June depending on how the situation evolved. The distribution of said editions would be supported by official UNOG broadcasts.
- **Arbitration Commission:** The Council noted that one of its members had submitted an application before the Arbitration Commission (AC) challenging the electoral base of Council elections. The AC requested input from the Council and the Polling Board, which was provided.
- As was custom, a meeting of the newly elected EB with the Director-General would be planned as soon as the COVID-19 situation allowed.

A discussion followed on the situation of the Pension Fund. It was recalled that for the Fund to be actuarially balanced it required a minimum of USD 60.3 billion asset value, which seemed to still be maintained. While an audit had been carried out and its results were yet to be released, it was presumed that the main reason for the head of investments of the Fund to step down was the underperformance of investments due to risks taken. It was suggested that the SG may be held accountable by staff for the performance of the Fund, as well as the former incumbent with potential civil and criminal charges depending on the circumstances.

6. Work programme

The draft work programme had been circulated among Council members which integrated all comments received to the extent possible. The Council adopted the work programme and agreed to circulate it via broadcast.

7. COVID-19 situation

The Council noted that many staff had written to the Council with questions and doubts over their contractual situation, health insurance, status in Switzerland, and other issues vis-à-vis COVID-19, which had been answered and followed-up with, including liaising with management when needed. Earlier in March the Council had requested the administration to make telecommuting mandatory for all staff, which they did.

Staff on fixed-term and permanent/continuing appointments continued to enjoy stability pertaining to their UN employment. Issues were complicated with regards to temporary staff, especially those whose contracts would expire soon, raising concerns in respect of their stay in Switzerland and access to medical insurance. At a recent meeting with the DG and heads of entities, assurances were given that no staff would be left without medical insurance, and this was the agreement obtained from management (although not yet in writing). It was also learned that a complete recruitment freeze was being implemented across the entire Secretariat.

On the extension of temporary contracts, the guidance from management was for them to be extended wherever there were available funds. Information was also received that UNHQ-NY recommended to extend all contracts where possible until 30 June (clarification still needed on this point).

Concerning the grace period for carte de légitimation, the Swiss mission agreed to temporarily extend it from 1 to 3 months. On medical insurance, as per UNSMIS rules, staff whose contracts expired were able to continue benefiting from it provided they paid both their prime and the Organization's, and that they were affiliated to UNSMIS for at least 6 months.

On the issue of telecommuting, various staff had approached the Council with concerns, notably related to certain managers micromanaging and imposing exaggerated measures to track the work of staff whilst teleworking. It was noted that flexibility by managers was being encouraged by the Organization. A discussion followed on the changing work style and its impact on staff.

Council members discussed the impact of the situation on the future of the Organization, notably risks of job cuts and outsourcing, and how overall and extended telecommuting posed a threat to the existence of UN regular contracts.

The Council continued to liaise with the Office of DG, and staff representation was asked to participate in the UN agencies' Security Management Team. So far there was no noticeable likelihood of going back to the office. Any decision in that regard would be taken in unanimity and in coordination with the host country and WHO, but was unlikely before the beginning of May.

A discussion followed on the UN liquidity crisis, the recruitment freeze, the COVID-19 situation and their impact on staff. The EB would continue to work and keep the Council informed.

8. Update on SHP

The Council recalled the townhall meeting that the SHP organized at the instruction of the DG following the lack of consultation raised by staff representation, at which many questions were asked and answered later in a broadcast from SHP. The DG also instructed the head of the SHP transition team to hold regular meetings with the Council. During the previous meeting, staff representatives asked how staff would feel about finding themselves in the new building in the context of the COVID-19 situation, and the answer of SHP was that there was no link between spread of viruses and open space and they would look at furniture options. SHP also confirmed no staff would move to the new building until the beginning of 2021 at the earliest, that an outdoor and indoor link between the new building and E building were provided for in the plans, and that the heads of IT departments were involved in the discussion of harmonizing the proper provision of equipment to staff.

The EB would study how best to move forward, especially in a potentially gloomy future regarding job security in the COVID-19 context. A suggestion was raised to engage an expert to research and provide advice on the relation between open space and the spread of viruses.

9. Update on SMC

Council members were informed that SMC discussions continued on various subjects, although unfortunately not very functional on the staff side, i.e. the working group on downsizing had failed to reach agreement on its TOR, and neither did the working group on delegation of authority (DoA). Concerning the working group on performance management, the Council would actively participate and work on a survey to gather comments from staff on the matter. It was noted that a memorandum from UNHQ-NY administration had been released in mid-March giving heads of departments broader authority on termination of contracts (permanent and continuing appointments). Feedback from management was requested and still expected on this new development.

The SMC was postponed to June due to COVID-19. UNOG was expected to submit papers on issues related to downsizing, outsourcing/UNOPS contracts, geographic diversity, YPP/NCE, and investigations in cases of misconduct.

10. G1-G4 review group

The Council agreed to renew the membership of the G1-G4 review group as follows: Aminata Monnet, Cédric Jacquot, Catherine Peck Arif, Elizabeth James, Dominique Chantrel, Philippe Duparc.

11. Any other business

- SAFI during renovations: Following recent discussions with the DG and SHP team, the administration was offering two alternatives: (1) leave the SAFI store in its current place for the entire duration of the renovations but with physical access limitations, then moving it to its final location, or (2) move SAFI to the cafeteria area during renovations until moved again to its final location. The SAFI board inclined for the second option, which although implied certain additional costs, but would hopefully prove much more profitable in terms of sales being the cafeteria at very centric and busy area of the Palais. It was noted that the COVID-19 situation would have a negative impact for SAFI and would be monitored as the situation evolved.

The meeting as adjourned at 5.30 p.m.