



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

Minutes of the 3rd meeting

held on 12 May 2020 at 10 a.m. via MS Teams

Council members present: ALMARIO Francis; APOSTOLOV Mario; BALD Iain; BALI Mohamed; CHANTREL Dominique; CHAOUI Prisca; DUPARC Philippe; 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: ALEKSANDROVA Anna; GAZIYEV Jamshid; MUKAMUSONI Angelique Ruhana; STANOVIC Marko.

The meeting opened at 10 a.m.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 2nd meeting

The minutes of the 2nd meeting were adopted without changes as recorded in the Council secretariat.

3. Report of the Finance Commission

The FC reported that the auditors of the 2018-2019 accounts had informed that their work was finished but their report still needed to be finalized. Very few financial transactions had been executed in the recent weeks.

4. Report of the Executive Bureau

The EB reported on its activities since the previous Council meeting (other matters covered under separate agenda items):

- **Staff on temporary contracts:** Given the COVID-19 situation, some temporary contracts were discontinued. Following discussion with management, it was clarified that staff can have their CDL extended for an additional period of 3 months after the end of their contract but not exceeding 30 June, plus under certain conditions UNSMIS rules allowed for the continuation of medical insurance for up to 3 months. Human Resources was yet to come back with an answer on whether the Organization could cover its part of the insurance premium of staff who found themselves without a contract due to COVID-19. It was made clear by management that if there was no need for the function and/or no funds were available, contracts would not be extended.
- **Hiring freeze:** The Controller recently held a global townhall following a request from the Council and stated that funds were available to cover salaries until September-October, but a complete hiring freeze of RB posts had had to be implemented since 1 April to guarantee for the cash to be available. Selection processes would proceed up to the point of actual selection of a candidate and then put on hold until the freeze was lifted. Those on special post allowance would continue receiving it. Recruitment of XB posts, consultants/IC and interns was not affected. Lateral moves would be allowed only if within the same department/budget where there was no cost to the Organization.
- **Delegation of authority (DOA):** After the Administration changed its DOA framework in 2019 without consultation with staff unions, management accepted at SMC VIII to install a working group on the subject. Earlier in 2020 a memorandum by USG DMSPC delegated further authority to heads of entities on termination of all types of contracts, notably permanent and continuing, in cases of downsizing. With the COVID-19 situation, budget cuts could be expected during the future budget cycles.

- Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC): A JNC took place on 4 May 2020 and the following items were discussed: UNOPS contracts in UNOG, return to the office, SHP, recruitment freeze, payment of overtime. Concerning UNOPS contracts, UNOG management acknowledged that staff in UNOPS contracts in ICTS were performing regular functions (arguably not the case in the Library where personnel was engaged under UNOPS contracts for certain projects). The administration was looking into how those positions could be regularised, but it could not commit at present due to the financial situation of the UN.
- Meeting with the Internal Justice Council (IJC): Jamshid Gaziyeu was thanked for his work as member of the IJC. A meeting with staff unions took place and the following issues were raised: whistleblower protection, investigations, handling of misconduct cases, accountability of managers and the delay in the issuance of judgments mainly the one related to Geneva post adjustment.
- CCISUA GA: Originally to be held in June, the CCISUA GA was postponed due to the COVID-19 situation.
- SAFI: Concerning the SAFI location during renovations, two options were presented to the DG for her decision, (1) to stay four years in its current location (next to a construction site) before moving to the final location in the E building, or (2) spend two years there, followed by two years in the main cafeteria area, to be then moved to its final place. The SAFI board, SHP and UNOG CSS endorsed the second option. As for SAFI's reopening amid the COVID-19 situation, it was expected to remain closed until Palais could resume normality (likely in August).
- UN Today: The staff magazine would continue in a solely digital format until September due to the COVID-19 situation.
- UN Port (UN beach): UN Port was set to open the following Friday. Ian Richards and Mohamed Bali were thanked for representing the Council at UN Port's Committee with management.
- Townhall: The Council organized a townhall covering various issues of interest (notably related to the COVID-19 pandemic). Repeated positive feedback had been received, noting there were over 850 attendees.

A discussion followed. The DOA memorandum from DMSPC was noted to be a de facto change in the rules governing staff employment, and the Council expressed its concern about it, specially bearing in mind the complicated context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Policy on downsizing was noted to still be in negotiations at the SMC level. As for the work in the Library involving hiring on UNOPS contracts, its "project" nature was questioned.

5. Return to office

The Council recalled that management had been much more open to consultations with staff representatives since new Director-General took office, which meant relations with management had much improved. On the issue of return to office, it was also recalled that the Council had sent out a broadcast asking staff to express their concerns, from which stemmed over 50 emails. The staff feedback was summarized and sent to management. The Council met with the UNOG COVID-Response team and also discussed the matter at a JNC meeting. It was noted that only critical staff was being allowed back on Palais premises, and that a gradual return of staff on-site would begin on 8 June (maximum 30% occupancy), to be reassessed by end of June.

Staff representation argued with management that staff cannot be obliged to take on sick leave when they were not able to perform their duties from home in the context of mandatory telecommuting. This was noted by the administration to be the case.

Concerning the wearing of medical masks, the administration would not make them mandatory in line with host country and WHO recommendations, except for staff whose work involved close contact with others. Council members expressed concern about this, given that masks were still recommended when not able to keep social distancing; the administration had stated that with a reduced occupancy, in principle it would allow to maintain the required distance.

As for conferences in the Palais, management informed they were studying the issue. The Council would monitor this closely as the situation evolved bearing in mind the exposure of staff to sanitary risks.

The Executive Bureau agreed to engage an external advisor to assist the Council in an awareness campaign on the issue of potential long-term telecommuting and its adverse effects on UN jobs and working conditions. It was made clear that, whilst the Council did not oppose telecommuting – specially to preserve staff health – fully-fledged telecommuting could not become the norm once normality resumed.

6. SHP

A meeting of the joint working group on SHP had recently taken place, at which staff representatives were assured that no staff would move to the new H building at least until the 1st quarter of 2021. The timeline of the SHP project was being reviewed. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, in principle the Administration would only allow 1 out every 2 desks to be used, and it was looking at space dividers and other potential measures. Even though the staff representatives at the meeting argued those measures might not be reassuring for staff, SHP maintained they could not stall the move to the new building indefinitely due to contracts already in place. SHP showed willingness to discuss about avoiding to tear down the E building after the renovations, but said the building would require expensive works. SHP refused to reconsider the layout of the new building due to the potential cost implications.

The Council agreed staff should be given the chance to express their feedback and would thus circulate a survey to the staff in entities due to move to the new building in 2021. As for the policy towards those who would refuse to move to the H building, it was considered still too early to take any action. The matter was also considered delicate since pushing for the clear option against moving staff to the new building – telecommuting – could entail risks on jobs and working conditions. The possibility of lobbying the GA against hotdesking was discussed.

7. SMC

The Council was informed that SMC discussions were expected to take place soon, namely concerning DOA and changes to the staff selection policy. The Council was also preparing to submit to SMC a paper on outsourcing over the next couple of weeks. Other working groups in place were developing their work, i.e. on downsizing, performance management and mobility.

8. Pension Fund

The Council took note that no development had been observed since its recent townhall. The Fund's actuarial situation was positive, and it was looking into "green" investments. Issues concerning the Geneva office, including staffing issues, were raised with the new CEO of the Fund at a recent meeting.

9. Green commuting

The Council recalled increasing concerns vis-à-vis the expected return to office pertaining to the use of public transport, and the risks it involved amid COVID-19. The Executive Bureau had deemed appropriate to encourage staff to cycle to work, and with that in mind to sponsor a one-day bicycle a repair workshop on Palais grounds once activities were resumed. The Council approved.

10. Collection

The Council was informed that, as of that day, CHF 18'900 had been collected in solidarity with the local Geneva community affected by the COVID-19 crisis. On the recommendation of the Executive Bureau, the Council agreed to top-up the collection by CHF 10'000 as per its guidelines on collections and previously established limit. The association Partage, the main Geneva food bank, was accepted as beneficiary.

11. Any other business

No other business was raised.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.05 a.m.