



## 38<sup>th</sup> UNOG Staff Coordinating Council 38<sup>ème</sup> Conseil de coordination du personnel de l'ONUG

### Minutes of the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting

held on 25 June 2020 at 11 a.m. via MS Teams

**Council members present:** ALEKSANDROVA Anna; APOSTOLOV Mario; BALD Iain; BALI Mohamed; CHANTREL Dominique; CHAOUI Prisca; DAWADI Niraj; DUPARC Philippe; GAZIYEV Jamshid; JACQUIOT Cédric; JAMES Elizabeth; KALOTAY Kalman; KHAN Anjum; LIN Dan; MEYER Olivier; MONNET Aminata; MUKAMUSONI Angelique Ruhana; NOVIKOVA Alina; PECK ARIF Catherine; RICHARDS Ian; SHELDON JOHNSON Laura.

**Council members absent:** ALMARIO Francis; KELLY Paul; SMITH Bradford; STANOVIC Marko.

*The meeting opened at 11.05 a.m.*

#### 1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted with changes as reflected below.

#### 2. Adoption of the minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting

The minutes of the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting were adopted without changes as recorded in the Council secretariat.

#### 3. Report of the Finance Commission

The FC reported that due to the Covid confinement only a few transactions were observed. The funds from the collection for the Geneva food bank was released to the beneficiary as approved by the Council (CHF 30'216 collected plus CHF 10'000 contribution by the Council). It was noted that the auditors of the 2018-2019 accounts had not been able yet to finalize their audit report due to the Covid confinement, who informed they would do their utmost effort to finalize it as the return to office gradually took place.

#### 4. Report of the Executive Bureau

The EB reported on its activities since the previous Council meeting:

- *Return to office:* Information was made available that attendance in the Palais des Nations had reached 18% since 8 June (when the maximum established capacity was 30%), which was noted to be similar to other organizations in Geneva. Contact had been continuous with the DG's office and senior management on the return-to-office plan. Each department took the lead in organizing their return to office. OHCHR and ITC management had not been very responsive in the Council's request to check if they were in line with UNOG recommendations, but until then no complaints had been received from their respective staff. Following a recent meeting with the DG, staff representation was informed that the maximum capacity of the Palais would be raised to 60% as of 6 July and staff would be encouraged to increase their return to office in that same measure. The issue of closed facilities was raised with management, noting Eldora was refusing to open the cafeteria without enough clients, but at the same time its closure discouraged staff from going to the Palais. Concerning staff from outside the duty station, a broadcast was issued reminding those staff that it was recommended to register in the Trip Security system. Staff with Covid risk conditions or living with family at risk are not to be obliged to return to office. The concern of the Council was reiterated to management where telecommuting for a long period should be avoided to the extent possible but without putting the safety of staff at risk, as Member States needed to be reassured of the need for the physical presence of staff in the Palais. Depending on the feedback from staff following the message of the DG about the increase in return-to-office capacity to 60%, the Council may decide how to proceed.
- *Delegation of authority (DOA):* Having been recently extended, an increased DOA was feared by staff representation to significantly allow for an increase of the risk of abuse, including in the use of financial

resources. This was brought to the attention of the SMC staff unions, some of which showed opposition to take up the issue directly with the SG. Work continued on a draft consensus letter from the staff unions to the SG. It was noted that the recent memorandum from DMSPC extending DOA on contract termination was not in itself an administrative decision on a staff member that could be challenged legally; pressure on the matter would be exerted through political means.

- *SMC*: Several SMC working groups were noted to be active. The working group on downsizing policy would soon be submitting its report. The working group on DOA remained under discussions. Staff unions requested management – who agreed – to share information about the upcoming exercise to grant continuing appointments, to be shared with staff once received. The realization of the continuing appointments exercise was noted to be generating questions among staff. On fixed-term contracts, staff unions expressed to management their expectation for the 1-2-2-5 years rule to be respected. A request was also submitted to management to set up a working group on regional representation, although the administration only accepted to give a presentation on the issue and set up a focus group.
- *CCISUA*: The decision was taken by CCISUA members to virtually carry out the CCISUA GA to discuss mostly procedural items during a 3-day session. It was noted that the HLCM would be soon adopting its report on “future of work”.
- *Interns*: Although the Council did not represent interns, it had actively been supporting them. As UNHQ NY intended to adopt a policy to put in place remote internships, the interns’ main network Fair Internship Initiative was actively against it for various reasons. They continued to have the encouragement and support of the Council.
- *UN Today*: It was noted that the magazine had much improved in terms of content and outreach. Council members were invited to contribute content. The July/August issue on the topic of sustainable fashion was to be launched in the following days. An event would be hosted at the UN beach inviting diplomatic missions and advertisers, for which the EB approved an envelope of CHF 2000 under the magazine’s budget. The Council deeply regretted that there were a few members of the Council and UNOG staff who were supporting an outside magazine against the interests of their fellow UNOG colleagues. The EB was in touch with management to prevent an external, non-UN Secretariat related staff union magazine from being distributed on UN grounds.
- *Summer camps*: Specially negotiated offers to UN staff for summer camps were obtained and informed to staff.
- *UN beach*: Special thanks were expressed to Council members Ian Richards and Mohamed Chiraz Baly, and the Council’s assistant Froylan Silveira, for their efforts in ensuring the continuity and success of the UN beach, with recent great recent improvements including a new floating pontoon, in benefit of staff welfare.
- *Security and Safety Service*: It was noted that SSS management was intending to introduce a new type of employment contract on the basis of “when actually employed”, covering very short periods and paid by the hour. Various personnel issues had been and continued to be discussed with SSS management. Special thanks were expressed to Council member Philippe Duparc who remained very active in defending staff interests during the Covid confinement period, as well as to all security officials who had never stopped working during said period.

## **5. Strategic Heritage Plan**

The recent survey of staff in OCHA, OHCHR and the Division of Administration showed 68% of respondents refused to move to the new building. The working group with SHP had held two recent meetings and these results were presented to them. The postponement of staff moves to the new building was considered not feasible by SHP due to the connected different contracts already ongoing and costs and legal implications a postponement would imply.

SHP proposed to make certain arrangements just to cover the period of the Covid situation, i.e. reduced capacity of the building, avoid people facing each other, slightly increase height of separation panels. For staff

representation this was not acceptable as it did not address the uncertainties of the future with Covid and other diseases in general. SHP refused to reopen the discussion of the open plan office type. It was noted that the Medical Service recommended separation panels of up to 1.80 m when people were facing each other. The DG was looking at what was happening with open office plans in other duty stations.

Staff representation requested from SHP a copy of the safety study of the E building that was carried out years before, which served as basis to decide to knock down the E building after renovations. It seemed senseless that the E building was deemed unsafe and had to be torn down while staff had worked there for many years and would still continue to do so for several more until the end of the renovations. If the E building could be kept with any necessary modifications, it would allow for a less dense and safer new building. The Council would continue exploring that option.

## **6. Equal Pay campaign**

The external lawyer engaged by the Council on the WMO pay cut case before the UNAT informed that the Tribunal would review and decide on the case during its then current session, and that it was possible it would be looking into the merits. On the UNOG staff pay cut case before the UNDT, the Council wrote twice to the UNDT president inquiring about their long delay, noting the hearing had taken place in October 2018 and the judgment should have been issued 3 months later. The UNDT President replied saying their judgment should be out in June. It was noted that the UNAT decision would be key on how to proceed after the UNDT reached a decision.

## **7. Racism**

The SG had recently held a townhall in NY, after which he sent a letter to all staff recognizing there was racism in the organization, entrusting human resources and the Ombudsman to put in place an action plan in coordination with the staff unions. At SMC, staff unions asked management about it and whether it would be only a Secretariat or CEB-level action plan, on which management was yet to reply.

## **8. Pension Fund**

Recently a decision was taken to transfer the Finance Section of the Pension Fund to the NY office and the affected staff in Geneva moved to the client service area. Two meetings took place with the management of the Fund and a paper was submitted trying to convince of the contrary. EB members would meet later that day with the affected staff and another meeting would take place with the senior management and the affected staff. Although the staff representation's position against the reduction of the Geneva office was strongly presented to the Fund's management – as would have a deep negative impact on service delivery – they refused to put a hold to their plans. CCISUA was preparing a letter to put pressure. The option of raising the matter to the Pension Fund Board was on the table.

## **9. Any other business**

Concerning the recruitment freeze that resulted from the cashflow situation of the organization, there were concerns that continued vacant posts would affect the mandate of the organization. The freeze was expected to continue at least until sometime in 2021. The impact of the Covid crisis was also expected to hit as of 2021, especially in the context of the adoption of the organization's budget by Member States. It was recalled that last massive downsizing of the organization took place in 1995 also in the context of a crisis. The Council agreed to continue pushing at the SMC level for a policy on downsizing to be put in place as fast as possible.

*The meeting was adjourned at 12.35 a.m.*