

United Nations Nations Unies

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Dear Ms. Chaoui,

Thank you for your letter dated 10 November raising concerns on behalf of the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council.

OCHA remains committed to sustaining our presence in Geneva, and we certainly have no plans to close our office there. In fact, we have reinforced and strengthened our office in Geneva since 2018, with the relocation of senior posts as part of our organizational reform. We created the Humanitarian Financing and Resource Mobilization Division and Coordination Division, with both Directors at the D2 level based in Geneva. Two additional D level positions were also moved there, Policy and Information Management. The sustained presence of OCHA's senior leadership and staff in Geneva reflects our recognition of the importance of strategic and senior-level engagement from OCHA in Geneva, where so many parts of the humanitarian community are headquartered.

At the same time, OCHA is very much a global and field-driven entity of the UN Secretariat. We have a global workforce of incredibly talented staff working in 63 countries, the majority of which are based in hardship duty stations. Of our global workforce of over 2,000 staff, only 30 per cent of them are based in our headquarters of New York and Geneva. Our office in Geneva represents about 15 per cent of our workforce. As operational needs evolve, we must contract and expand our presence, in the field and at headquarters. OCHA's organizational agility and flexibility is critical to us being able to fulfil our mandate effectively and operate within the finite financial resources available to us. In the last year, for example, we have begun the process of closing our offices in Pakistan and the Philippines, while opening new offices in Burkina Faso and Venezuela.

The same principles apply to our headquarters, and the decentralization of headquarters' functions is a strategic choice to ensure field-focused headquarters' services are closer to the offices that serve people in need. We therefore decided to decentralize 23 professional staff and abolish some general service posts in Geneva. Throughout the process of this decision making, we have consulted with affected staff and staff representatives, and ensured that all of our actions aligned with UN rules, regulations and relevant guidance. OCHA's senior management, including myself, have held several meetings with OCHA staff representatives and the UN New York and Geneva unions in 2019 and 2020. In 2020, the ASG a.i. held monthly meetings with OCHA staff representatives as well as other dedicated meetings with Geneva and HQs based staff impacted by decentralization. These meetings informed staff of the business rationale of the decentralization process, the reasons why specific locations were selected for decentralization, the content of the written guidance notes and Q&As, the planned sequencing of the decentralization, and how we would manage the abolishment of GS posts.

Ms. Prisca Chaoui
Executive Secretary
UNOG Staff Coordinating Council
Geneva

For those GS staff impacted by the decentralization process, we are taking specific steps to support them and mitigate impact. We have instituted an external hiring freeze on GS appointments in Geneva; we have offered and will continue to offer, funding for training and courses for GS staff who wish to develop new skills to take on different roles in other parts of the United Nations or elsewhere; we are offering career coaching and are actively advocating for GS staff with other UN Secretariat Departments that have relevant vacancies; we will support requests for long term (up to two years) of Special Leave Without Pay for any GS staff based in Geneva; and, if staff wish to, we are offering enhanced agreed separation packages to GS staff on permanent and continuing contracts, etc.

I agree with you that the context caused by the pandemic has added additional stress to our staff. I remain particularly concerned about staff in hardship duty stations in field locations, many of whom are in sub-offices in the 'deep field'. We have therefore made the welfare of our staff a priority for us. Throughout 2020, we have expanded our internal capacity for counselling, set up a 24/7 hotline, conducted self-care sessions, and created a COVID-19 specific Duty of Care Strategy. We have also expanded our partnership with The Rome Institute to provide psychosocial support services related to COVID-19 trauma to all staff.

Thank you again for your letter and I look forward to continuing to work with the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council, the NY Staff Union and our own OCHA Staff Representatives, to address staff concerns during these difficult times.

Yours sincerely,



Mark Lowcock
Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs
and Emergency Relief Coordinator