



39th UNOG Staff Coordinating Council 39^{ème} Conseil de coordination du personnel de l'ONUG

Le Bureau exécutif | The Executive Bureau

Minutes of the 6th meeting

held on 4 May 2021 at 9 a.m.

Members of the Executive Bureau	BALI Mohamed	Present
	DUPARC Philippe	Present
	JOHNSON Laura	Present
	KALOTAY Kalman	Present
	MEYER Olivier	Present
	RICHARDS Ian	Present
	SMITH Bradford	Present
President of the Council	CHAOUI Prisca	Present
Vice-president of the Council	PECK ARIF Catherine	Present

The meeting began at 9.05 a.m.

Point 1 Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted with changes as reflected below.

Point 2 Racism

The EB welcomed remarks from fellow Council Member Nicole Lewis-Lewington who was invited to take part in the meeting for this agenda item. Issues of racism both at the workplace and in staff members' private lives were mentioned, with focus on the issues within the scope of the Council and EB, i.e. racism at the workplace. The EB recalled that Council officeholders had met with the Secretary-General (SG) very recently during his visit to Geneva and raised this matter with him, noting staff expected it to be addressed in a timely manner, on which the SG agreed.

The UN Secretariat Task Force on racism was expected to finish putting together an action plan by September to serve as a guiding document and adapted by departments for implementation. It was for staff representation then to open and lead a real discussion among staff, possibly through focus groups, informal meetings, diversity advisors, and raising awareness initiatives. A suggestion was raised to bring up the issue at the upcoming meeting with the Director-General (DG) and to look at options with her to tackle racism at the Geneva level. The matter of racism would also be a topic covered in the UN Today July issue.

A discussion followed on the possible implementation of focus groups, their inclusiveness, how best to allow experience-sharing in a protected environment, and the importance of education. The difficulties of focus groups were also mentioned, such as the extent of which they could actually render results, their reach, and their potential cost. Other alternatives were mentioned to get the overall discussion going, such as Live Events/townhalls and finding colleagues willing to share their experiences. The Executive Secretary agreed to meet again with Nicole Lewis-Lewington to consult on a programme for an informal discussion on this topic.

Point 3 Adoption of the minutes of the 5th meeting

The minutes of the 5th meeting were adopted without changes as recorded in the Council's secretariat.

Point 4 Languages Service

The EB was briefed on a recent meeting with LS management on the subject of translators' workload. Staff representation made suggestions, encouraging management to listen to staff concerns, but no concrete plan resulted from the meeting.

A discussion followed. A suggestion was raised for all communications with local LS management to stop in light of their refusal to hold proper consultations, the already ongoing legal challenge of the workload increase, and the nature of the issue beyond Geneva. Being a global issue, it was argued that discussions on the matter should take place between management and staff in the four duty stations concerned (New York, Nairobi, Vienna, Geneva). EB members regretted noticing a language of intimidation and threat from management towards staff in some cases, and noted management had already met to evaluate the impact of a possible strike.

Other arguments were raised against the stopping of communications just yet, to give management the opportunity to evaluate and reconsider their position, where an open dialogue would possibly be more beneficial at this time. Proposals to raise with management included a more flexible interpretation of the GA resolution on work standards, and the establishment of legitimate working groups with the participation of the chiefs of services who were more aware of the intricacies of the work concerned. Such groups would communicate their results to senior management within a timeframe. It was also suggested that we could suggest that the status quo be maintained until an evaluation of eLuna took place, as well as bringing on board mediators to assist in moving the issue forward. The possibility of a strike was also discussed.

The EB agreed to maintain the course of legal action and communicate to staff about it, and not to submit any proposals to DGACM senior management until the other staff unions were onboard. The EB would continue discussions on the matter as the situation evolved.

[A summary of the meeting with LS management can be found below as Annex I.]

Point 5 Meeting with the SG

The EB noted the recent meeting with the SG was very positive overall. The SG was receptive on most points raised by staff representatives. A broadcast would be sent out informing staff. [A summary of the meeting can be found below as Annex II.]

Point 6 Future of Work

The EB discussed a draft letter to address the SG on the issue of 'future of work', although the letter had been conceived at a time when he was refusing to meet with staff representation. The EB agreed not to pursue such a letter at this time.

Point 7 SMC

The EB recalled that the SMC had held a meeting recently. [A summary of the meeting can be found below as Annex III.]

Point 8 Investments

The EB recalled its meeting with a Mutuelle Investment Officer where he was asked for advice on possible investment options for the Council. A reply with such options was expected soon.

Point 9 CCISUA

The EB recalled that CCISUA members had held a meeting recently. [A summary of the meeting can be found below as Annex IV.]

Point 10 Meeting with Director-General

EB members discussed what issues to raise with the DG at the upcoming meeting with her, including SHP, ICSC cost-of-living survey (to confirm and specify her support), translators' workload and interpreters' remote work (notably from the staff well-being perspective), racism, issues in SSS (particularly a lack of career prospects), and recent changes to the issuance of Legitimation Cards by the Swiss authorities.

Point 11 CAGI

The EB was informed through the International Geneva Welcome Centre (CAGI) of an issue whereby the association of property managers in Geneva complained that there seemed to be a trend of international civil servants challenging contractual rents. The EB affirmed it had no knowledge of any effort by the Council to lead such trend, nor by management to the best of its knowledge. EB members refused any allegation of staff representation involvement – in any way, shape or form – in a so called "campaign" against property managers. Notwithstanding that, the EB acknowledged that every private citizen, international civil servants included, could take action as it is their right to do so. The EB welcomed continued dialogue with all actors of international Geneva, as well as under the auspices of CAGI to that effect.

Point 12 Any other business

The EB took note of the resignation of Council member Naima Abdellaoui from the Finance Commission. The Council would be called upon to elect a new member to the vacant seat.

The meeting was adjourned at 10.20 a.m.

Annex I: Summary of the meeting with LS management of 29 April 2021:

The meeting started with a discussion whether to meet on ad-hoc basis at SRMG level, which was up to LS management to determine.

LS management: the DG asked management to engage more with staff reps at the local level. Important to keep dialogue going.

Staff representation: When we talk to staff they have little confidence in working groups, there is lack of trust. Staff feel unheard, disrespected... they feel things are unfair. Before we get into technical details, management needs to come to the staff, perhaps through external and independent mediation. The SCC can't do it on its own. It's a management problem. Look at the high number of staff going for legal recourse. Management has a crisis. It doesn't matter what happens in the Tribunal. It's for management to address it.

LS management: The DG expects management in Geneva to take action in Geneva and Mr Abellian expects the same thing. Figures show less than 10% in NY joined the MEU request. No one in LS has been fired on basis of problem with productivity alone. The SCC must have accurate facts so to not end up in a situation where uncaught fears become facts when those are actually based on smoke. If people are afraid of being fired they should tell me. I have told chiefs they need to provide support to staff. Recycled text will be credited to all staff during first year as mitigating measure, everybody will be expected to meet new workload standard. If high percentage of staff in Geneva feel that way, but not elsewhere, this will be a Geneva problem that needs to be solved in Geneva.

Staff representation: We note this is not official consultation. This is informal meeting. The last meeting also was only informal, not a consultation. Management needs to come up with something new, perhaps some concessions. There have been cases that prompt fear in staff (example in French translation mentioned).

LS management: It is unfair to bring a case to the table and not allow me to provide additional information.

Staff representation: We are not here to argue individual cases. The issue is how management has approached the staff and that's what is important to deal with. Things now are not working, they have to be fixed from the top. Staff feel unheard, so they don't have faith in the outcomes of working groups.

Staff representation: We recall that it has been said in the past there is a perception that Geneva is the one having a problem. But looking into the percentage of cases, there were staff reps in New York discouraging staff to file the MEU request and legal action, thus lowering the numbers. Also a lot of staff in New York have a different dynamic with staff representation. This is to tell you not to think that the problem is in Geneva. If you are ready to negotiate we are willing to reach consensus, a middle point. It is up to management to be willing to negotiate to start. Don't believe the problem is only Geneva. We count on you.

LS management: We appreciate having an open discussion, it is helpful. How we find a way forward is a different challenge. Policy comes from New York. We don't have a solution now. I take your point on concessions. There is indeed a perception in New York that Geneva is the problem and there is no issue elsewhere. Perception in New York is that Geneva staff are uncooperative and inflexible. Discussions should remain ongoing, although will still keep SRMG.

LS management: We welcome this frank and open conversation, and to see what can be done. We reached out to SCC because the DG is concerned that staff actions may have unintended consequences – the vote confidence of last year had Member States look into the workload which led

to them increasing it. Translation and interpretation professions are faced with technological changes. Covid will only accelerate it.

Staff representation: Management should bring staff and their reps back to the table. Get conversation going with staff addressing their fears. Issues such as an independent audit of eLuna. The staff want this information upfront before agreeing to anything, mindful of the lack of trust and what has become a vicious cycle.

LS management: The independent mediator is an interesting idea, will see what can be done. We could meet again in a couple of weeks, would be good to have regular meetings until things settle down. **SCC and management agreed.**

Annex II: Summary of the meeting with the SG of 29 April 2021

- The UNOG Staff Coordinating Council (SCC) met with the Secretary-General and the Director-General of UNOG on 29 April to raise a number of issues that are of concern to staff. Prisca Chaoui, President, and Brad Smith, Executive Secretary, represented the SCC.
- While acknowledging positive initiatives, such as gender parity and women leadership, the SCC underscored that merit should be the paramount consideration in any selection decision that is being taken. We highlighted the impact of an annual budget on the renewal of fixed term and temporary contracts leaving some staff in precarious situations. We also noted our concern that the staff management consultation framework (SMC) is not working as it should and instead of being a genuine consultative body is rather an information sharing platform. We appealed to the Secretary-General to ensure that the views of staff are taken on board in these consultations.
- We noted concerns about the introduction of the new « agility » contract, which affects employment security. We noted that the current contractual arrangements already met the needs of the Organisation, when used appropriately, and that contractual stability is at the core of an independent international civil service. The SCC also highlighted that the current policy on flexible working arrangements (FWA) is sufficient to address the needs of staff and that FWA should remain a choice.
- On delegation of authority and decentralization, which the Secretary-General supports, we noted the potential for abuse citing specific examples. We highlighted the need for a more robust accountability framework. We also noted concern about the lack of follow-up on the part of the Administration regarding referrals of cases by the Tribunals regarding cases of corruption and maladministration.
- We also discussed racism within the Organisation, the Strategic Heritage Plan, the ICSC cost-of-living survey, and the introduction of new technologies and their impact on working conditions and health of staff. In this regard, the SCC raised the issue of increased use of remote interpretation and need to take preventative and mitigating measures to address the negative impact on interpreters' health.

Annex III: Summary of the SMC meeting of 29 April 2021

- Issue of various interest groups (e.g., Young UN) being given opportunities to provide their views on various topics while elected staff representatives were not provided the same opportunity. The Staff Unions underscored that these groups are unelected and unaccountable groups of individuals that claim to represent staff views. The Staff Unions recalled Staff Rule 8.1 on staff representation bodies and in particular that "...formal contact and communication on [matters relating to staff welfare] shall be conducted at each duty station through the executive committee of the staff representation body, which shall be the sole and exclusive representative body for such purpose.
- Issue of flexible working arrangements and unfair application of remote working owing to ambiguities in the policy's definition and approval procedure which refers to "compelling personnel circumstances". Staff Unions recommended that policy be reviewed to remove references to personnel circumstances and that requests should be considered on exigencies of service and satisfactory performance. The Staff Unions also underscored that the fact that these is no right to

flexible work arrangements and that these arrangements are defined as voluntary agreements between staff and manager are a source of friction. The Staff Unions stated that if the Organization's commitment to flexible working arrangements is genuine then this should be considered a right, albeit subject to oversight. In addition, denial of FWA should be considered an administrative decision subject to management review. Staff Unions also stated that no medical evaluation should be required when considering FWA requests and that the procedure should be subjected to strict deadlines with escalation of cases limited to one or two steps up the chain of command.

- Further discussions were held on mandatory learning programmes and management agreed to take on board many of the concerns raised by the Staff Unions in the framework of its two-year cycle for training content and review. Management noted that it is working on an integrated learning management system with a view to providing courses which are concise and relevant, that enhance user experience and accessibility and that are multilingual. Management had contacted course owners to further harmonize courses and they will try to group thematic trainings together for the next cycle. Again Staff Unions strongly opposed any linkages with completion of mandatory training requirements and discretion of the FRO to grant leave.

Annex IV: Summary of the CCISUA meeting of 28 April 2021

- The first point of discussion was the withdrawal of the New York Staff Union from CCISUA with various staff unions expressing disappointment with this decision.
- Following the departure of the New York staff representatives from the meeting, there was a call for unity and on how to cover various working groups that NY was previously active in.
- A discussion then ensued regarding the ICSC review of local salary scale methodologies, the cost-of-living survey and the jurisdictional set-up on the UN Common System. It was mentioned that the working group on the local salary scale methodology had not finalized its work. On the cost-of-living survey, the staff unions noted that the sister federations are willing to look into the survey and that if it goes ahead there may be gains for some duty stations but losses for others. UNOG SCC and others took the floor opposing any cost-of-living survey this year due to the disruption in consumer spending caused by the COVID19 pandemic. It was agreed to oppose any survey this year.
- On the harmonization of the tribunals, reference was made to the report of the harmonization of the internal system of justice. Points were made on increasing exchanges between the tribunals and that UNDT and UNAT had a lower number of cases coming out in favour of staff. Some staff unions expressed concern that the GA was imposing its will on those agencies that do not fall under the authority of the GA and underscored the independence of the tribunals. It was also noted that NY needs to hand over documents pertaining to this issue. ILO stated that they prefer the status quo. It was noted that a draft statement is being prepared by the Legal Working Group on this issue.
- It was agreed to hold the CCISUA general assembly in early June. UNOG recommended that Ian Richards take part in discussions with ICSC as he has the background and in particular owing to the departure of NY from CCISUA.