



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

Le Bureau exécutif | The Executive Bureau

Minutes of the 16th meeting

held on 31 August 2021 at 1 p.m. via MS Teams

Members of the Executive Bureau	BALI Mohamed	Present
	DUPARC Philippe	Absent
	JOHNSON Laura	Absent
	KALOTAY Kalman	Present
	MEYER Olivier	Absent
	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 1.05 p.m.

Point 1 Adoption of agenda

The agenda was adopted with changes as reflected below.

Point 2 Adoption of minutes of the 14th and 15th meetings

The minutes of the 14th and 15th meetings were adopted as recorded in the Council secretariat.

Agenda of upcoming Council meeting

The EB agreed to postpone the next Council meeting to 16 September at 1.15 p.m. Agenda items would include: ICSC's Geneva cost-of-living survey for Geneva, SHP, Working Group on Racism, SMC.

Point 3 Cost-of-living (COL) survey

The EB noted that the Local Salary Survey Committee (LSSC) had started meetings in an informal basis with the participation of Council leadership. As per ICSC guidelines, LSSCs in each duty station would have to decide whether the situation (particularly in the COVID context) was conducive to carry out the survey, with "general return to office" being one of the requirements. Staff representatives in the LSSC expressed this was not yet the case. The feeling was that the ICSC was pressuring LSSCs to carry out surveys, but staff representatives at the meeting highlighted it was for the Committees to make that decision. Should the Geneva staff representation agree to go ahead with the COL survey in Geneva, the EB recalled that it would be advisable for staff in France not to participate.

EB members further noted that the interpretation of "general return to office" was brought up during the recent ICSC session. It seemed the ICSC was interpreting it as having the building open, an interpretation which the federations opposed.

The EB discussed whether it was a good time to carry put the COL survey, considering certain prices had gone up. The overall view was that whilst some categories of expenses had seen a rise in prices, the situation remained distorted concerning many types of expenses, including costs associated with actually going to the office, such as commuting expenses and meals. The EB noted that the main purpose of a COL survey was to ensure stability for the following five years.

The EB agreed to continue engaging at the LSSC and inform staff as discussions developed.

Point 4 Outcome of ICSC session

EB members were briefed on the recent ICSC session:

- a) Concerning the COL survey, the ICSC was pushing for it to be carried out. Despite the Chief Executive's Board vehement opposition to carrying out COL surveys in the current (COVID) context, the ICSC continued to insist on it.
- b) On education grant, the ICSC accepted to again recommend to the General Assembly a sliding scale in school fees and the inclusion of boarding assistance.
- c) On GS salary methodology, the ICSC accepted the report of the working group, including to avoid the use of external data. Said data would be used but as a parallel comparative project.
- d) Concerning interns, several ICSC commissioners were of the view the organizations should pay interns. They recommended for them to approve some form of financial support to them.
- e) Concerning the Young Professional Programme, staff representation at the session raised issues of recruitment and promotion.
- f) Concerning payment of salaries in hard currencies beyond E duty stations, the ICSC agreed to recommend to the General Assembly to extend it to D duty stations.

Point 5 Afghanistan

The EB noted that the situation of UN staff amid the recent events in Afghanistan was being closely followed up at the federation level. On 22 July federations jointly wrote to USG DSS and SRSG in Afghanistan asking for the relocation of all non-essential staff and to share evacuation plans with the federations. Two reminders followed without any answer. When Kabul fell, the three federations sent a letter to the SG asking about the safety of national staff. In the following days CCISUA continued to follow up and sent another letter to the SG, as well as raising a petition to have national staff evacuated as they faced increasing threats to their personal safety as UN staff.

Management refused to share any information with the federations and communicated only in general terms. A meeting would be held later that day with the USG DSS, Resident Coordinator, and Special Representative of the SG at which federations were hoping to get more specific information.

The EB noted the underlying fear that the real issue behind the evasiveness of the Organization was its unwillingness to evacuate staff to avoid antagonizing the new authorities and be able to maintain operations inside the country. Staff representation, however, was very worried for staff personal integrity and safety. EB members agreed to send letters to OCHA and OHCHR senior management raising the issue of national staff there to inquire about the measures being taken to ensure their safety and eventually evacuating them.

Point 6 Special Post Allowance (SPA) committee member

Following the retirement of Kalman Kalotay, the EB nominated Laura Johnson to join the SPA committee.

Point 7 Staff-Management Committee (SMC)

Concerning the upcoming SMC in-person meeting in Bonn, staff unions agreed to hold a pre-meeting to prepare (exact number of days to be determined by the unions). The EB agreed to recommend to the Council the approval of an expense of 1 to 3 nights of DSA for the two staff representatives attending, should it be necessary for the pre-meeting.

The EB reviewed the composition of the Council's delegation to the upcoming SMC meeting in Bonn. Ian Richards was designated as member and Laura Johnson as alternate.

The EB was informed that the Council's representation at SMC would be raising the issue of UNDT's inability to rescind certain administrative decisions where monetary compensation was the only alternative. EB members noted such cases did not allow for accountability, where compensation did not correct the wrong nor necessarily motivate the Organization to avoid infringing its own rules. A paper was being finalised for submission to SMC on "specific performance".

Point 8 Any other business

- The EB agreed to invite staff for a virtual townhall to update them on various issues to be held tentatively on 30 September.
- EB members discussed return-to-office policy and what the Council's position should be vis-à-vis management. The view of the members was that management should lead the matter and keep staff informed.
- The EB was informed that the Finance Commission (FC) was trying to open a new bank account to split cash assets and avoid negative interest rates. Options being looked at included BCGE and Credit Suisse which currently allowed balances up to CHF 2 million without negative interest rate, and alternatively Migros Bank.

- On possible investments, the FC had been looking at various options, although so far without a concrete investment proposal due to the complexity of the issue, namely the difficulty to identify suitable financial investments in CHF which could offer positive interest rates for the relatively low amount which could be invested, and the legal standing of the Council to purchase real estate. The option and required guarantees to invest at UN Port premises was still under discussion with management at the level of the UN Port Committee.

The meeting was adjourned at 2 p.m.