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

Minutes of the 8th meeting

held on 19 January 2021 at 11 a.m. via MS Teams

Council members present: ABDELLAOUI Naima; ALEKSANDROVA Anna; ALMARIO Francis; APOSTOLOV Mario; BALD Iain; CHANTREL Dominique; CHAOUI Prisca; DUPARC Philippe; GAZIYEV Jamshid; JACQUIOT Cédric; JAMES Elizabeth; KALOTAY Kalman; LIN Dan; MEYER Olivier; NOVIKOVA Alina; PECK ARIF Catherine; RICHARDS Ian; SHELDON Laura; STANOVIC Marko.

Council members absent: BALI Mohamed; DAWADI Niraj; KHAN Anjum; Niraj; KELLY Paul; MONNET Aminata; SMITH Bradford.

The meeting opened at 11.05 a.m.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes as reflected below.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 7th meeting

The minutes of the 7th meeting were adopted without changes as recorded in the Council secretariat.

3. Report of the Finance Commission

The Finance Commission reported that the audit of the 2019-2020 accounts was still ongoing, hoping the auditors would be able to submit their report before the staff General Assembly to be held by the end of January. Concerning expenses, so far only operational ones for UN Today had been registered.

4. Report of the Executive Bureau

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

- *Impact of the pandemic on the work of staff members:* as UNOG went back into semi confinement the previous week following the host country's Covid measures, the Director-General agreed to allow the Palais to remain open for those who needed to come, as requested by the Council following its survey on staff well-being in the context of the pandemic, where many staff had expressed interest in still being able to come to the building. Concerning the vaccine, it was noted that the UN Secretariat in all duty stations (except hardship ones) would not be assuming vaccination efforts and that t staff needed to go through the national vaccination programmes.

- *Fixed-term contract renewals:* as different departments had been applying different duration criteria for the renewal of fixed-term contracts, the issue was raised at SMC where management confirmed that would advise all departments to issue 2-year extensions wherever possible. This however went against policy and the General Assembly mandate to extend contracts up to 5 years where possible. Whilst the measure allowed to increase the renewal period of contracts in certain departments who were renewing for less than 2 years, Geneva strongly opposed it at SMC as it deprived staff from the established right to have a contract up to 5 years where possible.

- *Recent Joint Negotiating Committee meeting:* A broadcast was sent out to all staff informing about the latest JNC meeting and the details of the discussions. Items discussed included: the regularization of personnel on UNOPS contracts (the administration recognized some staff needed to be regularized and they would be issuing a certain number of job openings); Legitimation Cards for family members of staff living in France who had been denied because they were not already in possession of one and were only requesting it because of the pandemic (it was clarified any previously issued CDL would be renewed).

- *OCHA delocalization:* A communication was sent to the USG of OCHA requesting clarifications on the delocalization of posts away from Geneva, but there was no clear answer on the reasoning behind it and how to protect staff from job losses.
- *E-voting:* It was noted that the EB had approved the request of the polling officers to finance eVoting to the level of CHF 4'000, as approved by the Council in the 2020-2021 budget.

5. Future of work

The Council noted that the CCISUA leadership did not seem to be willing to follow up much on the matter of future of work (proposed 'agile' contracts by the CEB administrations). Many staff unions, including Geneva, were willing to launch a campaign as was their mandate and not remain hostage of any blockade at the level of CCISUA. Discussions continued among staff unions to launch a commonly agreed survey on the matter, expecting it still to be under a CCISUA unified approach.

6. Staff-Management Committee

Management proposed a new system that would make performance management a more 'agile' process and wanted it to become effective as of the following cycle (April 2021). A working group on performance management was already in place which undertook a review of the current performance management system and policy, as well as the proposal. Staff unions argued it was not prudent to accelerate the implementation of a new ST/AI with a totally new system in the upcoming new period. Also, there were already disagreements in the working group that needed to be addressed, including on the issue of not having the work plan locked in Inspira. To the knowledge of the staff side, the newly proposed system had not been tried in any department yet and the final report of the working group remained pending.

The Council recalled that in the past, whenever there was disagreement at SMC, the matter was referred to the Secretary-General who basically always took the side of his management team. A discussion followed on the benefits and disadvantages of a potential withdrawal from SMC, on which discussions were ongoing with other unions.

Concerning the working group on selection policy, the Council noted there had not been much progress recently, although discussions continued. The staff side remained with concerns on some proposals from management.

7. Language Service

Council members were informed that a communication had been sent to DGACM senior management in NY requesting clarifications on how they would be interpreting the text of the recent General Assembly resolution that increased translators' workload from 5 to 5.8 pages, and to inquire how exactly did they defend staff before the GA. They replied they only gave factual information to the GA.

Concerned staff were noted to be outraged by the increase of their workload, especially in the midst of the pandemic. A letter was sent to the DGACM USG communicating the position of staff which was that by no means they could accept the increase, and that there was a way to interpret the resolution accordingly. Management put up in place a working group but refused to include staff representatives in it, calling it a 'managerial working group'. Staff representation asked that any changes should be consulted with them before being implemented.

A discussion followed. The right of staff to be consulted on new policy was highlighted, as well the possibility of opening legal channels of recourse against the implementation of the increased workload, plus increasing the level of communications with senior management. It was clarified that before the Council could initiate any legal action, there was the basic principle of having an administrative decision affecting the contractual working conditions of an individual staff member had to be met, as per established UNDT jurisprudence.

8. Strategic Heritage Plan

Council members expressed regret that management have decided to go ahead with the move of staff into the H building as of spring, despite the opposition of staff representation, especially in the midst of the pandemic.

The main argument of management was the impossibility of putting on hold the project due to programme and contractual constraints. Staff representatives pressured the SHP Transition Team to engage with staff directly, and finally they agreed to organize a townhall which would be taking place in the following days.

A discussion followed. Management's attitude towards staff was noted to have been one of disparage since the beginning of the SHP, where they hesitated to seriously discuss issues with staff and would normally put staff representatives before a 'fait accompli'. In light of the evolving pandemic, Council members argued the H building remained not safe for staff. The upcoming townhall would serve to bring up these issues publicly.

The discussion continued. It was raised that the administration had a duty of care and it was not behaving as such by moving staff to open space in the H building. The EB would continue to follow up the situation closely.

9. SAFI

The Council was informed that SAFI would be closed until the end of February due to the restrictions imposed by the Swiss authorities in light of the pandemic. The SAFI Joint Management Committee (where three staff representatives are present) agreed on the recruitment of a new manager as of April, which seemed a very positive development to professionalise and improve SAFI as a shop. As part of the operational changes the Committee needed to implement to adapt SAFI to the evolving situation, contractual conditions of SAFI staff were modified. Some of said staff who did not agree with the changes decided to resign from their position benefitting from the legally required compensation. The staffing changes were noted to ensure SAFI could reshape its workforce in light of current and future challenges. For the time being, SAFI was being able to receive financial assistance from the Geneva canton going towards staff costs.

Furthermore, SAFI would be hosting post office services on its premises (following the closure of the Palais' post office) as soon as it could reopen. The SAFI Committee also agreed it was not in a position to transfer to the Council any profits following the 2019 exercise given the losses faced in 2020 due to the pandemic.

10. UN Today

The Council was asked to approve the EB's nominations for the UN Today Board as per the magazine's terms of reference: Prisca Chaoui, Alex Mejia, Christopher Mason, Ian Richards, Muriel Scibilia, Olivier Meyer, Paola Deda. The Council approved the nominations and thus appointed UN Today's Editorial Board for a period of two years until 19 January 2023.

11. Any other business

The Council expressed its wholehearted appreciation for soon retiring Council member Elizabeth James for her track record with the Council over the years and her strong commitment to the cause of staff.

The meeting was adjourned at 12.45 p.m.