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

Minutes of the 6th meeting

held on 16 October 2020 at 1.15 p.m. via MS Teams

Council members present: ABDELLAOUI Naima; ALEKSANDROVA Anna; APOSTOLOV Mario; BALI Mohamed; CHANTREL Dominique; CHAOUI Prisca; DUPARC Philippe; GAZIYEV Jamshid; JACQUIOT Cédric; JAMES Elizabeth; KALOTAY Kalman; LIN Dan; PECK ARIF Catherine; RICHARDS Ian; SHELDON JOHNSON Laura; SMITH Bradford.

Council members absent: ALMARIO Francis; BALD Iain; DAWADI Niraj; KELLY Paul; KHAN Anjum; MEYER Olivier; MONNET Aminata; NOVIKOVA Alina; STANOVIC Marko.

The meeting opened at 1.25 p.m.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted without changes as reflected below.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 5th meeting

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

3. Report of the Finance Commission

The FC recalled that the audit report of the 2019-2020 accounts had been recently received and circulated for comments. The audit report would shortly be discussed in the Executive Bureau

4. Report of the Executive Bureau

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

- Return to office: no comments had been received from staff concerning management's decision to reinstall regular flexible working arrangements (up to 3 days telecommuting) since 15 September, which appeared to show that the return-to-office was working well. The EB noted the Covid situation in Geneva and France was worsening, although there was yet no indication from the administration to change its current policy. Information was received that occupancy in the Palais had reached approximately 50%.
- Clubs: various fitness clubs had contacted the Council to ask them to intervene with management to allow them to resume their onsite activities. The EB contacted management to ask them to consider the request, bearing in mind the host countries position on cultural/sporting activities Their reply was still pending.
- Liquidity crisis: following a request from the Council, the Controller held a global townhall on the issue of the UN's liquidity crisis, where he confirmed the organization had enough funds to pay salaries until December 2020, at which time an important influx of cash was expected from Member States. The Controller made clear that to continue ensuring payment of salaries, the recruitment freeze would not be lifted in 2020, possibly 2021 as the liquidity crisis was still expected to continue.
- Intervention of the EB in cases of several departments:
    - *Pension Fund*: following the opposition of staff representation to the move of the Fund's Geneva finance section to New York, the Fund's Board put the move on hold whilst it looked into the matter.
    - *OCHA*: In light of a decentralization/downsizing process (including the abolishment of posts), several OCHA staff had made contact with the Council expressing concerns. A communication was sent to OCHA senior management requesting information about the impact on staff.

- *Language Service*: The Council recalled it had expressed support to the recent resolution of the Language Service staff calling for the respect of their working conditions. Discussions among staff unions continued to see how best to follow up with senior management in New York on the issue. Efforts of the EB to engage the Service were complimented.
- *Security and Safety Service*: A survey was launched among SSS staff to gather their opinion on areas of concern pertaining to their working conditions. The results would allow the Council to identify issues and represent SSS staff more effectively.

- Request for legal assistance from Council member: the EB was not in a position to endorse such request, which had been communicated to the Council member.
- Working group on Well-being: following the results of management's survey on telecommuting, management's members of the working group on well-being approached the Council with a proposal to set up a new mechanism to help staff members. The Bureau's response was that there was no need for such a new mechanism when the Council already had that mandate and had 25 elected members to carry it out. If there was any case of staff with work-related issues concerning telecommuting, they could be referred to the Council.
- 75th anniversary: Seeing the only official celebration project at UNOG of the UN's 75th anniversary was a photo mosaic, the EB put in place a small task force to brainstorm ideas of potential activities to celebrate in the Covid context. It was set for discussion at the following Bureau meeting.

5. Equal pay campaign

Geneva staff unions had met with the ICSC leadership two weeks before to discuss how to address the issue of having two different post-adjustment settings in Geneva. It was the impression of the unions that the ICSC and heads of agencies were under pressure by Member States to carry out a cost-of-living (COL) survey in 2021, starting with New York as the base comparator. This would take place after the adoption of the new post-adjustment methodology due to be approved in March 2021. Whilst it had been the reiterated call of the Council to hold a COL survey as soon as possible to end the inequality of salaries in Geneva and other duty stations, the Covid situation now put into question the viability of such exercise. Renowned statisticians had been consulted and they advised against it due to the current economic crisis and patterns of consumption that had been seriously impacted, which could result in a distorted survey pushing salaries further downwards. A communication was sent to the DG expressing that the Council could not support a COL survey in 2021 in such circumstances, notwithstanding the principle of equal pay for equal value work.

6. Future of work

The Council was updated on the issue of "future of work", recalling the broadcast recently issued on the matter. For context: discussions began one year before at the High-Level Committee on Management (HLCM) studying means to renovate and harness tools for change. These discussions had included looking at contractual modalities, which led to a study of demographics of staff and types of contracts. Not long after, the Covid context began, a "pulse survey" was conducted by management (which the Council had opposed), where the results were used to say many staff found a good work-life balance in telecommuting. Management's take-away of that led to the preparation of an HLCM report pushing to promote remote and project-based contracts that would go in detriment of the current contractual stability of staff.

Geneva staff representation insisted for our federation, CCISUA, to be strongly active and lead the issue as it pertained the entire UN common system, but regrettably the federation was not demonstrating active leadership on that subject. The Council also pushed to create a CCISUA task force on "future of work", which was yet to be formed. As the Council was still member of Public Services International (PSI), their support was requested, and PSI submitted a letter to the SG in support of staff representation.

Another proposal raised by management was to create a working group within the ICSC to look at contractual modalities. Staff representation expressed to the ICSC its view that such proposition was not acceptable for staff as the matter was still at this point subject to consultation.

Thanks to staff pressure, management changed their view and accepted staff representation to be part of the HLCM task force looking at the “future of work”. Also, management agreed not to bring this matter into the context of the ICSC until it had matured at the level of HLCM.

The EB sought the assistance of the same external advisor on the equal pay campaign to assist the Council on outreach and staff/management engagement on the issue of “future of work”. Council members were encouraged to share any ideas.

A brief discussion followed. A suggestion was raised that staff representation should put together a concrete proposal on “future of work”. It was also suggested that the UN should take into account the ILO conventions that put in place a human rights-based approach on matters such as “future of work”.

Geneva staff representation had already requested for the federation to write a paper on “future of work”. Seeing a lack of will to draft it, it was further suggested for the CCISUA Executive Bureau to ask for volunteers from the unions, although they finally decided to engage a consultant to draft it. Council members were welcomed to volunteer to contribute.

7. Racism

Since the previous Council meeting, a task force on the subject of racism was put in place by the Secretary-General, where two staff reps from the entire Secretariat were allowed to participate. The task force received a one-year mandate to draft an action plan to tackle racism in the organization. The Council noted how its Geneva survey on racism generated momentum on the issue. It was agreed to take the lead and draft a paper on the matter. It was also agreed to propose the creation of a working group on racism at UNOG that would function on an ongoing basis.

8. Update on SMC

The Council recalled that the SMC working group on downsizing had finalized its report in recent months and submitted it to the SG. Management and staff disagreed on certain points, notably concerning the order of retention, tiebreakers, sub-delegation and other issues. The SG accepted some staff proposals such as including disability as a tiebreaker but refused others such as excluding sub-delegation to heads of entity.

The SMC working group on mobility and selection continued to be active. It had recently finalized its work on mobility and was due to touch upon selection. Management only raised a few points on retirement age and eligibility to apply to job vacancies, but staff representation refused to enter in a shallow review exercise as the matter was complex beyond said punctual items. Staff representatives would continue to follow-up on this in the coming months.

The working group on performance management had revisited the current performance management system. The Administration proposed a whole new concept of performance management that did away with many established safeguards. Once the proposal was further substantiated the EB would discuss it and inform Council. This discussion was also linked to the “future of work” as the new performance management system proposal seemed to support more precarious working conditions.

Concerning the membership of the Internal Justice Council (IJC), the plenary thanked council member Jamshid Gaziyev for his valuable contribution in that body as his term was coming to an end and a staff rep from ESCAP would be appointed to replace him. Regrettably, the Council took note that management submitted changes to the qualification requirements for IJC membership without consulting the staff side. This was said to reflect an ongoing trend where the Administration neglected to consult staff on matters they should clearly be brought to their attention.

9. Strategic Heritage Plan

With staff safety and well-being in mind, the plenary deemed unfortunate that management continued ignoring the Council’s calls to take more decisive action regarding safeguards against Covid. Despite staff insistence to reduce the pace of works to give time for more clarity on the fight against the Coronavirus and implement more thorough safety measures, the SHP continued at full speed with the completion of the H building. Staff representation also advocated to stop the plans of knocking down the E-building tower to allow less staff to be housed in the H building and thus increase social distancing, but SHP maintained its plans as they were before

Covid with the exception of some measures such as re-arranged seating to respect a minimum of social distancing, slightly higher separation panels, plus offering more telecommuting options. The Council would continue to strongly uphold the principle that it was for the employer to give staff a safe work environment rather than send people to work from home. Another issue staff raised was potential health problems stemming from the type of the fabric of the furniture, but SHP defended it citing the manufacturer's claim that their fabric adhered to all standards.

10. UN Today

The Council remarked that the staff magazine UN Today was approaching one year since its renewal from the previous UN Special. The plenary expressed its thanks to all Council members actively contributing in the editorial committee.

Draft terms of reference for UN Today had been circulated to the Council members in advance of the meeting for their review, as recommended by the EB for adoption. Seeing no objections, the Council adopted the submitted terms of reference for UN Today.

11. Any other business

The matter of the expected closing of the post office in the Palais des Nations was raised. It was noted that the decision to close the post office was made between management and the Post. Staff representation, with the help of the SAFI board, in order to preserve the postal services within the Palais offered them space at SAFI, which was finally agreed by management and the Post. It was clarified that no Council member played any role in the closing of the post office, but rather efforts were undertaken by the Council to maintain a postal presence inside the Palais.

The meeting was adjourned at 2.20 a.m.