



**41st Staff Union Council
2023-2024**

Ref. SU-41-6

Minutes of the 6th meeting

held on 5 October 2023 at 1:30 p.m. via MS Teams

Adopted on 30 November 2023

Council members present: ABDELLAOUI Naima; APOSTOLOV Mario; BALI Mohamed; CHANTREL Dominique; DUPARC Philippe; GOLOGUS Marius; GONZALEZ Pablo (Deputy Executive Secretary); HERMELINK Ursula; JACQUIOT Cédric; JOHNSON Laura (Executive Secretary); LEWIS-LETTINGTON Nicole; MARTINEZ Begoña; PALAIRET Rowland; PECK ARIF Catherine; PEJCHAL Viera; RICHARDS Ian (President);

Council members absent: AJAYI Ayobamidele; GAZIYEV Jamshidbek; JAUHAN Khanam; LA PLANETA Jean-Luc; NWOKEABIA Hilary; PUHALOVIC Janet; RUEDA Almudena; SMITH Bradford (Vice-president); TOUALBIA Radouan.

The meeting began at 1:35 p.m.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted with changes as reflected below.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 4th and 5th Council meetings

The minutes of the 4th meeting were adopted, with a comment being made on the necessity of circulating minutes in a timely fashion. The minutes of the 5th meeting were adopted.

3. Report of the Executive Bureau

The Council was briefed on the activities of the Executive Bureau since last Council meeting, namely:

- The CCISUA mid-term meeting would be held in November in New York. Once the mid-term closed, staff reps would lobby Member States delegates attending the General Assembly session. The mid-term would serve as a platform to coordinate positions on issues affecting staff globally, such as pension, mental health, compensation, etc. The UNOG Staff Union would send a delegation of three people to the CCISUA meeting and would also assign a team of three to lobbying Member States. The DS and the President would be part of both delegations; the DES would attend the CCISUA mid-term; whereas Executive Bureau member Mohamed BALI would assist in the lobbying of Member States, on account of his experience in this area.
- On the issue of rosters, an ad-hoc SMC meeting had been held to address it. In it, management recognized that the decision made by the SG was neither what either the staff or management sides had proposed. In the meantime, the staff-side unions had carried out a survey amongst staff and the data were being analysed.
- An ad-hoc SMC meeting had addressed the issue of artificial intelligence. The drafting of the relevant policy had not even started.
- At the SMC, the staff side were updated on the continuing appointment exercise. The clearing of the backlog was expected to be completed by the end of the year.
- A JNC meeting had taken place at UNOG. The Long Service Awards ceremony was discussed, with an agreement for management and the Staff Union to sit down and draft standard operating procedures for future occasions. The situation of interns was also discussed, as requested by the Council. Management stated that the ST/AI regarding gratis personnel applied to them and that both interns and managers would be informed in this regard. On the issue of medical service recommendations, the Staff Union asked management if managers could refuse to accept a medical recommendation for special accommodation to be granted to a staff member. The Union was invited to check the UNOG reasonable accommodation guidelines against the Secretariat-wide ones, and to make suggestions at a subsequent meeting. One of the issues to clarify was the existence of an appeal mechanism. The issue of spaces for clubs was addressed regarding the changes required by the SHP implementation, and the Staff Union explained the specific requirements of the Music Club in this sense.

- The Staff Union met with the UNEP Geneva Staff Association. UNEGSA would prefer to be represented by the UNOG Staff Union, as opposed to the UNON Staff Union, due to the specificity of their concerns, as compared to those of their colleagues in Nairobi. The UNOG Staff Union and UNEGSA discussed shared concerns and avenues for stronger cooperation.
- The first meeting of the Working Group on Appendix B had taken place and at least there seem to be agreement on what the concerns were. The next meeting would be convened soon.
- Regarding the long-standing dispute between language professionals and their DGACM senior managers, a meeting had taken place with the Ombudsman, where she updated staff reps on the current situation. The Council was reminded that management had agreed to start mediation but had not specified on what issues or framework.
- A meeting with UNCTAD senior leadership had been the occasion to denounce failures in succession planning and misuse of SPA. The issue would be monitored.
- The tests for candidates to the position of Staff Union Admin Assistant would take place from the 7th to the 9th of October, bringing the Union closer to filling this important function.

A discussion followed. A question was asked about the possibility of staff to choose what Union they were represented by. It was observed that staff didn't seem to enjoy the same right as regular citizens to affiliate to a Union of their choosing. It was explained that the Staff Union was the recognised staff representative body in the sense of Chapter 8 of the staff rules; it is not a union in the Swiss legislative sense, and that even the ILO staff representation body had the same issue. Staff were nevertheless free to join Swiss unions as some council members had. The observation was made that current rules could be changed.

4. Report of the Finance Commission

The Finance Commission had given the order to implement the investment decision as endorsed by the Council in its 5th meeting. The CHF 300,000 investment tranche would yield a 1.2553 % interest over 6 months, and the CHF 700,000 tranche would yield a 1.3395% interest over 12 months. These interest rates were slightly lower than those initially announced due to the evolution of the markets in the intervening period. The Treasurer also conveyed the Finance Commission's decision to catch up on the accounting backlog created by the lack of an Admin Assistant.

5. Morocco collection

The Treasurer informed the Council that the collection to help the victims of the Morocco earthquake had reached 6,355 CHF. He proposed that, in line with usual practice, the Council would match the contribution of staff. The Council approved this proposal by consensus.

6. Update on the Long Service Awards

The DES updated the council on the preparations of the LSA ceremony. He explained, as background, that what used to be a Staff Union-led initiative had become, on instruction of the ASG OHR, an HR event and, accordingly, the Staff Union had ceded responsibility of a number of tasks to HR. Regarding 2023 preparations, the invitations had been sent, the seating plan had been set, the room had been booked, the certificates were going to be printed and the medals not already in inventory would be delivered shortly. Several Council members volunteered to help during the ceremony, which was welcomed with gratitude by the DES.

7. Mobility

The Council was briefed on the background and developments regarding this issue. The SMC staff side had successfully opposed management's attempt to subject every staff member to mobility. However, when the policy came out, it was discovered that, contrary to what had been agreed, a Head of Entity could assign a staff member to a position the staff member had not shown interest in. This was brought up at SMC staff-side meetings and at an SMC ad-hoc. Management refused to send out a corrigendum on the policy. It was still possible to get management to issue guidelines to specify that a staff member's opinion should always be taken into account. In the meantime, the Staff Union had sent a broadcast warning staff of the possible consequences of opting in. In the morning of 5 October, HR had briefed staff at large on the policy. It was noted that HR had the same understanding regarding the possibility of people to be placed against their will. There was a proposal to organize a townhall.

A discussion followed

An idea was floated that this mobility policy should bring an improvement in education grant benefits, since it forced staff to move often, and sending kids to international schools would be the most viable solution. There were also comments on the ease with which management ignored agreements with staff resulting from the SMC process, seemingly without consequence, prompting the question of why not taking management to the tribunals. This possibility, however, was not available for staff unions, since they lacked legal standing in the UN tribunals. An argument was made in favour of collective bargaining instead of consultations.

Regarding the actions of management, the ES and the President informed the Council that the SMC unions had already agreed to send a letter to the SG.

A discussion followed on the merits of involving the tribunals.

8. Energy efficiency measures

The Council was informed that the budget that UNOG operates on was established on the basis of the electricity prices paid the previous year. Given the announcement of price increases, UNOG had reached to UNHQ for guidance. UNHQ told UNOG to spend what they had and to revert when they had run out of money. The liquidity crises meant that, when UNOG reverted to UNHQ, no funds were available to pay UNOG's utility bills. The deficit was of 6 million dollars. UNOG was currently negotiating with the utility company.

There were several measures that were being implemented or planned. Amongst them were shutting off escalators, delaying switching on the central heating, closing buildings, the potential closing of the Palais during the end-of-year holidays, encouraging people to telecommute and perhaps allowing staff members to telecommute away from HQ. Management also asked the Staff Union for ideas.

An exchange of ideas followed, like encouraging switching off lights on leaving the office or making sure that meeting rooms are only lit when used. There was a proposal to make this part of the tasks assigned to security staff. It was indicated that it should be technically possible to remotely switch off lights. There was surprise that the Administration had not managed to negotiate a preferential electricity tariff for UNOG, and at the apparent contradiction between instructions to save energy and to keep computers on overnight. Smart shutters not working in the H building were also flagged as a source of excess electricity consumption. The SE pointed out that this energy crisis had ramifications for the issue of restricted telecommuting in OHCHR, since Member States should be shown that, before making requests about occupancy, they should make sure that they paid their contributions so that the office utilities could be paid. Additionally, situations like this should help managers understand the interest of acting with flexibility rather than by dictating restrictive measures.

9. Mobile reception in the H building

Council member Rowland Palairret read a proposal which asked the Staff Union to engage with management in order to obtain assurances that all mobile phone networks would be treated on an equal basis in the E building. This followed information that, as part of the SHP renovations, an agreement with the telecom provider Sunrise was being studied. In the past, a similar agreement for the H building had yielded numerous problems for staff that impeded efficient working and communications. The Council approved the proposal by consensus.

10. Security

The Council was briefed on the issues affecting security personnel, which included the ongoing review of appendix B, for which proposals would be sent to management. Of more immediate concern was the rotation exercise, which didn't seem to respect the established SOP, leading to forced rotations, contrary to the stated principles of the exercise, and had been carried out despite staff representatives having brought up concerns twice. Some of the movements would happen in a few days only, and not every staff member was trained to occupy their posts. It was stated that SSS management had circumvented regular staff consultation channels by creating a survey, in order to modify the rules of the rotation exercise. There had been instances of personnel being spared rotation, which management justified as a lack of succession planning, despite management having had plenty of time for planning succession. Situations like these led colleagues to suspect favouritism.

A discussion ensued where it was stated that any action should be prompt and concrete. Perhaps including action at CCISUA level. The ES proposed writing to SSS management, but it would be important to know how many people had been rotated against their will, instead of claiming favouritism, since this was a very serious accusation. It would be unwise to ask for the exercise to be stopped outright, since many of the changes introduced were in fact better for staff. She also suggested organizing an SSS townhall.

It was agreed that security staff reps and the ES could discuss the details of these actions outside the Council meeting.

11. OHCHR

The Council was briefed on the imposition of a minimum of three days at the office for OHCHR personnel. This was argued to be a move to align practices with the OHCHR office in New York, and that this had been a Member State-led decision.

The ES informed the Council that the Staff Union had intended to do as it had done in previous cases (OCHA, UNJPF) and write to senior managers asking them to reconsider. This was proposed to the OHCHR Staff Council, asking them if they wanted to co-sign. The SC asked the Staff Union not to send anything straight away, and that they would send a memo to management. This was done on behalf of both the SC and the Staff Union, but no response had been obtained. Therefore, the Staff Union intended to send a broadcast to OHCHR staff and senior management to make the argument that this change was not in keeping with the current FWA policy nor with guidelines from UNHQ senior management. Additionally, an argument could be made regarding the need for energy savings and UNOG management encouraging staff to telecommute.

A discussion ensued in which it was stated that toxic work environments encourage telecommuting and that defending FWA should be done cautiously, since it could lead Member States to push for hotdesking and impact the compensation package. The Council heard additional complains regarding the way in which OHCHR management had gone about communicating this change to staff, with very short notice, and without consideration of staff wellbeing and mental health. Additionally, increased staff presence in the Palais Wilson would aggravate the already serious lack of office space.

12. Any other business

An information was shared regarding the apparent lack of sufficient space for motorbikes and scooters in the framework of the SHP. The President suggested bringing this up in the Working Group on Mobility. With regards to the energy crisis, a question was asked about what had been UNOG's preparation in terms of solar energy. It was speculated that high initial investment might have curtailed attempts in this area, given the already high cost of the SHP. On the lack of parking space for certain types of vehicles, the ES also indicated the existence of a proposal to shift the distribution of parking spaces according to the seasons, since better weather was likely to encourage staff members to commute on two wheels.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00 p.m.