



42nd Staff Union Council 2024-2025

Ref. SU-42-6

Minutes of the 6th meeting

held on 27 September 2024 at 1:30 p.m. via MS Teams

Adopted on 11 November 2024

Council members present: Naima Abdellaoui; Dominique Chantrel; Mohamed Chiraz Bali; Tigest Desta; Cíntia De Lima Cardoso; Philippe Duparc; Marius Gologus; Ursula Hermelink; Laura Johnson; Jean-Luc La Planeta; Nicole Lewis-Lettington; Rowland Palairet; Catherine Louise Peck Arif; Janet Puhalic; Ian Richards; Maria Almudena Rueda Melendez; Bradford Smith; Marko Stanovic; Radouan Toualbia.

Council members absent: Marian Aggrey; Cédric Jacquot; Dan Lin; Begoña Martinez Alfonso; François Subiger; Philip Thomas.

The meeting began at 1:35 p.m.

1. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted as reflected below.

2. Adoption of the minutes of the 5th meeting

The minutes of the 5th meeting were adopted without changes.

3. Report of the Executive Bureau

The ES and DES reported on its activities and recent developments¹:

- Meeting with CCISUA: At the recent meeting with CCISUA representatives EB leadership was briefed on the meetings attended by CCISUA; on compensation review, meetings with the staff based in Lebanon to hear their concerns on security issues, on organizational issues for the CCISUA mid-term meeting in New York.
- Upcoming meeting with USG of DMSPC: USG would be coming to Geneva and would meet with the officeholders. Agenda items to be discussed were SG response to staff killed in the Middle East, impact of revised step determination policy on temporary staff, mobility requirement for promotions, union engagement with the USG of DGACM, possibility of fast tracking OIOS investigations, and OHCHR change management/restructuring and its link with mandatory mobility.
- Long service awards 2024: The ceremony would take place on 15 October. Council members were asked to volunteer to come before the start of the ceremony to help with registration and other organizational issues. The Council agreed to fund a cocktail, which would cost less than CHF 1,500. The Council approved the expense for the cocktail.
- JNC: The next JNC meeting would take place on 9 October and Council members were invited to propose agenda items for that meeting.
- Meeting with Polling Board: A meeting with the Polling Board was scheduled for 30 September to discuss how to determine the voters lists for the upcoming joint bodies elections. The ES also reminded Council members to consider submitting their candidacy for the CRB.
- SMC: At the next SMC ad hoc meeting, staff representatives and the management side would continue discussing regional parity/diversity issues and its inconsistent implementation in certain entities. Other agenda items included due process for dismissal of UNRWA staff members and eLUNA evaluation.

¹ Due to member absences, the Executive Bureau was unable to meet during the period between Council meetings as it was unable to achieve quorum.

- Road safety petition: In January 2024 the Council agreed to support the petition on road safety near the UN Port following the tragic death of an ITC colleague. In advance of the initiative's discussion by Geneva's cantonal parliament (Grand Conseil), the ES signed a letter of support on behalf of SU to the Grand Conseil. (The initiative was subsequently approved by the Grand Conseil)
- OHCHR issues: An OHCHR survey was delayed as the OHCHR staff committee was planning to launch another survey at the same time. A meeting with the staff committee is planned to discuss the change management process and upcoming OHCHR moves to the Palais.
- DCM: Meeting with the DCM Director took place and issues of teleworking outside of duty station were discussed. An HR representative stated that it was not allowed for operational reasons. It was also noted that teleworking outside of duty station would not be allowed even when combined with annual or home leaves. Further, the practice of teaching outside of working hours for translators and interpreters was considered unethical and would be banned after a one-year grace period.
- Medical Services: DES and Vice President met with the Medical Services leadership at the beginning of September to follow up on the issues of a security staff member whose sick leave days were reduced despite the treating doctor's prescription and another case that related to disability recognition. It was noted that partial disability was not recognized by UN, but UN Medical Services intended to advocate for partial disability to be recognized in the future. It was also agreed to prepare frequently asked questions for which SU would compile and send the questions by September .
- UNSMIS town hall meeting: A town hall with UNSMIS representatives was held on 26 September which was attended by more than 350 staff members. Many questions had been received as well. Due to high interest, a similar town hall with the GPAFI representatives could be organized in the future.
- SHP team report to the GA: A draft of the report was shared with the SU leadership. The report highlighted three key points: the project was overspent, the timeline had been extended, and scope reductions were proposed, particularly affecting buildings B and E. At the transition board meeting, it was revealed that Building E's completion date has been pushed back to March 2028. SU sent a letter to the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ) to raise concerns about the absence of staff perspective and SHP affecting mandate delivery in the report.

The Council members raised concerns that prohibiting translators and interpreters to teach even for free could have a negative impact on staff morale and UN image and cooperation activities with the universities. It was pointed out that an administrative instruction was there which prescribed staff members to seek permission for outside activities and it was very restrictive. It was also noted that such teaching was a good way for the organization to develop the next generation of translators and interpreters and was therefore a benefit to the organization. Some Council members noted that staff in general were limited from pursuing outside activities and doing so could only be done with the Ethics Office's prior approval.

4. Report of the Finance Committee

The CHF 700,000 invested in the special account for a year was about to lapse at the end of September. The return was CHF 9,000. Also, the CHF 300,000 invested for 6 months would end next month. It was requested to renew those investments for another year and 6 months respectively, which was approved by the Council. The Council was also informed that the cost of financial audit would go over the amount originally budgeted of CHF 4,000 but would be less than CHF 5000.

5. End of year Council dinner

It was suggested that the Council members meet physically at the end of the year at the Tennis Club meeting space and restaurant. The budget required would be around CHF 1,500. Council agreed with the physical meeting and approved the tentative budget.

6. Inter-Agency Games 2024

A disabled staff member would attend the IAG 2024 but she would require some assistance which her husband can provide. The staff member would become a dues-paying member, so her participation would be subsidized by the SU. Council members were asked if they would approve to subsidize the participation of that staff member's husband in IAG at a cost of 320 Euros and thus contribute to the participation of the

first disabled person in the IAG so that the organizers make the games more inclusive next year. The Council unanimously agreed with the proposal.

7. Office moves and available facilities

- Update from the Transition Board / New move schedule

The transition board meeting provided updates on office relocations, with moves scheduled between November and December for various entities. Building S1 is set for an open house on October 1st, though it won't be operational until late October or November. Concerns were raised regarding parking availability, space constraints, and delays in the completion of Building S2, which would not be ready until 2027. Communication with staff was identified as an ongoing issue, with efforts being made to improve engagement through broadcasts and town halls. The tower of building E would be fully closed at the end of 2024, with the remaining part of the building closing in August 2025. SHP still ended to demolish the tower and renovate the conference rooms, although the scope reductions proposed by the SHP team to the GA may change those plans.

- Testing of air of building H

The SU was dealing with ongoing concerns about air quality in Building H, where staff felt that the environment was stagnant. Additionally, there are air quality issues in the interpretation booths, particularly related to CO2 levels which were raised by a Council member. The SU together with the Administration was trying to identify specific booths where monitors could be installed.

The Council members pointed out that some managers still did not know the dates of their move. They further deliberated on what SHP scope reduction proposal could lead to while expressing their doubts that it would be approved by the GA.

8. Engagement with UNECE

SU leadership met on 25 July with the ECE Director of Administration. Further, an ECE staff survey was carried out from 27 to 30 August focusing on flexible work arrangements and the upcoming S1 move, which received about 102 responses. Following the survey, a meeting with the ECE Executive Secretary discussed concerns about potentially reducing flexible work arrangements, which currently allow up to three days of teleworking. Staff expressed dissatisfaction with the handling of the S1 move, lack of transparency in recruitment, and issues of abusive authority. Plans for a town hall meeting on ECE move to S1 were proposed.

Council members noted that a lack of transparency in recruitment was not specific to ECE but to all UN, which resulted from increased managerial discretion in recruitment. They noted a troubling trend where hiring decisions were increasingly based on personal relationships rather than merit or expertise, undermining organizational integrity, and urged to raise those issues at the SMC. The Council members also suggested meeting with the ECE management more frequently as that proved to lead to positive changes.

9. Engagement with UNCTAD

SU leadership met with the UNCTAD Director of Administration on September 6 followed by a survey of staff conducted from September 4-9, which had 122 responses. The survey revealed key issues, including unequal treatment, prohibited conduct, low morale, complications regarding the move to S1 and splitting the staff. Leadership's responsiveness to staff concerns was also rated poorly by respondents. Management took note of the low ratings for some survey questions. There were also ongoing concerns about leadership's handling of prohibited conduct cases. Those issues were brought up at UNCTAD's town hall meeting on 10 September. SU had planned meetings with the Director of Administration, ASG and the UNCTAD SG to discuss those issues. Upcoming meetings will address these challenges; UNCTAD leadership also expressed an openness to meet and engage with the SU.

10. Engagement with OCHA

The decentralization decision made in 2019, which began implementation in 2021, moved around 60 staff to Istanbul and 30 to The Hague. Istanbul was selected for its supposed cost benefits, but rising inflation has eroded these advantages. The Turkish government never provided an office space, forcing staff to

work remotely. The SU leadership met with OCHA staff that were affected by the decentralization and they were frustrated due to lack of cost-benefit analysis, staff and operational considerations in decision-making. They demand improved accountability as well as course corrections and moving staff away from Istanbul, but political complications would hinder course corrections or relocation. A town hall with the OCHA head was planned to discuss those issues.

The Council emphasized the importance of strong staff representation, particularly during major changes like OCHA's decentralization. They argued that effective staff advocacy could have mitigated uncertainty and saved resources. They also stressed that staff should be encouraged to file management evaluations and UNDT cases during such changes as it could have provided legal perspectives on the decisions made.

11. Engagement with UNEP

SU leadership holds regular monthly meetings with UNEP on an informal basis and at their request to discuss updates. UNEP would have changes in their staff association (local staff representation body) soon. Recently, they achieved an improvement in their Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA), allowing staff two days of remote work, with the possibility of three days in certain cases. UNEP staff were eager to move into the new Palais des Nations complex, while, according to the SHP report, 40 UN entities were also trying to have offices in the Palais. Additionally, UNEP will have a general assembly soon and SU would send its representatives.

The Council clarified that SU did not represent UNEP staff, and they were represented by the UNON staff union. However, they had a Geneva staff association that SU was engaging with on various issues.

12. Update from UN Geneva Staff Welfare Partnership

The partnership managing the beach, port, and tennis club faced challenges that year. Weather impacted UN Port finances, and recent storms caused damage to boats and infrastructure. Efforts are underway to manage repairs and insurance. For the tennis club, management was streamlining operations and upgrading facilities, focusing on energy savings, and broadening offerings to include additional racket sports like paddle and pickleball. Despite a slight membership decrease, there was renewed interest, especially among younger members, and positive feedback from users suggested the club was moving in a good direction.

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

Acronyms and abbreviations:

SU: Staff Union of the UNOG

EB: Executive Bureau of the Staff Union

ES: Executive Secretary of the Staff Union

DES: Deputy Executive Secretary of the Staff Union

SMC: Staff-Management Committee

FC: Financial Commission of the Staff Union

CCISUA: Coordinating Committee of International Staff Unions and Associations of the United Nations System

JNC: Joint Negotiating Committee bringing together the UNOG Staff Union and the UNOG administration

SHP: Strategic Heritage Plan