47th Staff Council Meeting Minutes

The meeting was quorate at 13:20 PM EDT with 26 Units present. The meeting was recorded. Staff Council Chair Mr. Sebastian Cervantes chaired the meeting and Secretary Ms. Kathryn Kuchenbrod took notes. All members of the leadership were present.

1. Adoption of Agenda

There was a discussion regarding the length of time and number of times a Council member may speak on a topic with reference to the Statute.

Mr. Stephane Jean (Unit 11) requested that an item about the earthquake in Haiti be added to the agenda.

Agenda was adopted.

2. Adoption of previous minutes

The adoption of minutes from meeting 47/2 was delayed pending review by those who had made comments.

3. Reports by Unit

There were no reports by Unit.

There was a discussion about the COVID-19 vaccine and return to the office before the agenda item regarding the associated resolution. Mr. Patel Noble (Unit 13) expressed concern about whether the Organization has the right to mandate vaccinations or ask for staff members’ status. Mr. Ken Rosario (Unit 15) asked to be added to the minutes that he had put the report from his Unit into an email he had circulated He also asked what the position of the Staff Union will be. Ms. Sophia Kuyell (Unit 8) expressed concern that Medical Services has been silent on the matter. Consequences are an issue because staff
members have labour rights. Mr. Arauz stated that the Union would back those who suffer consequences of not getting vaccinated.

4. President’s report, summary of communications, report from ICSC

No questions or comments on the Presidents report.

5. Executive Board report

No questions or comments on the Executive Board report

6. Staff Union finances

The Treasurer, Meriam Gueziel, stated that the payment for Mr. Arauz and Ms. Patricia Nemeth had been disbursed for the trip to Geneva for the 16-27 August ICSC 92 meeting. The Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer now have access to the UNFCU bank account, and the issue of petty cash will be sorted out. The matrix of staff members who have signed up for coverage has not yet been send to MetLife, but staff members who signed up are currently covered. This task will be attended to when the Assistant Treasurer, Jaime Garreta, returns from leave. The budget is awaiting the Programme of Work from Leadership.

Ms Gueziel stated that the 45th Council had been audited and the 46th was pending.

7. Resolution regarding “Establishment of a United Nations Staff Relief Committee in solidarity with the victims of the 14 August 2021 Earthquake in Haiti”

The purpose of establishing a Relief Committee is for the Staff Union to express solidarity with those who suffered in the 14 August earthquake in Haiti. The standard amount the Staff Union has donated for this kind of relief fund is $5,000. However, the Staff Union donated $20,000 to those who were affected by the explosion in Beirut on 4 August 2020 because it was close to the end of the mandate and there were sufficient funds to give more. Ms. Gueziel suggested we stick with $5,000 for this effort and in the future, and create a donation mechanism for staff who wish to give more.

The Staff Relief Committee will decide how the money is used, based on the needs and priorities in each situation. The members of the Committee will be in touch with NGOs or colleagues on the ground, and they will give a full report of how the money is used.

The resolution was passed with 27 votes FOR, with no votes AGAINST and no abstentions.

Mr. Ken Rosario (Unit 15) suggested postponing the resolution until after the special Staff Council meeting on the subject of the COVID-19 pandemic on 24 August. Barbara reminded the Council that the resolution itself was calling for the meeting with the Occupational Safety and Health committee and the Council. As such discussion continued and the Council opted not to postpone voting on the resolution. A question was raised as to whether field staff would be included. Mr. Arauz stated that it was most important to stay in touch with colleagues in other duty stations.

Mr. Stephane Jean (Unit 11) stated that staff members were expecting something big from the Staff Union. He suggested a survey on various topics related to the vaccine and return to office.

Ms. Gueziel stated that the administration has said that there has been no information about delegates regarding vaccination status. Member States have been driving what’s happening. Ms. Ellen Alradi (Unit 10) pointed out that the administration has done nothing in terms of dividers in the workplace and that social distancing is impossible. Permanent missions and delegates have access to their offices, and staff members are anxious.

Mr. Arauz stated that Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) regularly reports on occupancy. Currently that figure is 40%, and it will likely be higher when staff members return to the office in September. The Leadership has been pushing OSH to move the return date to October.

The resolution was adopted with 28 votes FOR and 1 vote AGAINST.

9. Resolution Afghanistan

Mr. Egor Ovcharenko (Unit 28) stated that all staff in place, not just members of the Union, should be supported. Mr. Rosario called for the Department of Safety and Security (DSS) be brought into the resolution, and that they consult with Union on threats faced by staff.

Council members who have contacts in Afghanistan raised issues related what staff are facing. Mr. Raidan Alsaqqaf (Unit 44) stated that colleagues in Kabul raised the issue of supply lines and ensuring lifesaving supplies, such as medicine, are received. Mr. Jesus Parado (Unit 32) stated that freedom of movement is the immediate problem. Mr. Jose Sobron (Unit 4) questioned how we can ask DSS staff to evacuate everyone, as some don’t want to leave, and others cannot leave their homes. Mr. Arauz objected to the use of the term “terrorist” as unnecessarily provocative and the implication that the Staff Union is asking for everyone to be evacuated.

The resolution was not adopted, with 6 votes FOR, 8 AGAINST and 9 abstentions.
10. Any Other Business (AOB)

No issues were raised.

The virtual meeting adjourned at 15:07 EDT.