47th Staff Council Meeting Minutes

The meeting was quorate at 13:25 PM EDT with 19 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

Mr. Arauz requested the addition of an item on the nomination of the Staff Legal Assistance Committee.

Before the adoption of the agenda, there was a discussion about the Arbitration Committee and Mr. Ken Rosario (Unit 15) asked whether it would be possible to invite the former Committee member, Ms. Alicia Lovell-Squires, to explain why she resigned from the Committee so that the Council will understand the issues brought to the Committee at the end of the 46th Council. Mr. Arauz stated that even with the resignation of one member, the Arbitration Committee has a quorum to make decision.

Ms. Barbara Tavora Jainchill (Unit 25) stated that she had concerns about the future functioning of the Committee, and it would be useful to hear the perspective of the former member. Ms. Tavora Jainchill made a motion to invite Ms. Lovell-Squires of the Arbitration Committee to a Staff Council meeting. The motion was carried, with 11 YES, 9 NO and 3 abstentions. There was also a discussion about bringing the whole Arbitration Committee to speak to the Council.

Ms. Simona Chindea (Unit 23) asked that an item be placed on the agenda regarding the creation of committee on health and safety.

The agenda was adopted.

2 Adoption of minutes

Minutes for meeting 47/5 and the special meeting 47/1 on Afghanistan were adopted.
3 Reports by units

Ms. Meriam Gueziel (Unit 24) stated that there was confusion in her unit about the COVID-19 policy guidance of 30 August, and she asked if the Leadership was going to follow up with the Joint Negotiation Committee (JNC). Specifically, some staff members were being required to come into the office even though they reported symptoms of the virus. There may also have been an outbreak in DC2 as a result. Mr. Arauz stated that there was a need for this formal consultation on the guidance.

Mr. Rosario stated that the Department of Safety and Security representatives submitted an email to the Under-Secretary-General regarding the COVID-19 measures. They were referred to the Office of Legal Affairs. The health status of two named staff members was revealed, contrary to previous assurances. The safety and security of staff members in Afghanistan is entering uncharted territory. Unit 15 has prepared a paper which, in conjunction with the Field Staff Union, submitted to the Staff Management Committee (SMC). Mr. Arauz stated that the Leadership would be bringing the paper to the SMC.

Mr. Egor Ovcharenko (Unit 28) asked the leadership to bring the issues of G4 visas and Laissez-Passer (LP) to the SMC.

Ms. Chindea asked about the status of the Staff Union website, and it was confirmed that it was up and running, and adopted resolutions and minutes were now available.

4 President’s report and summary of communications

Ms. Gueziel asked for some background information on the SMC item regarding the Performance Management Working Group. Mr. Arauz stated that the Office of Human Resources was obligated to come up with a new policy at the end of 2021, but the policy was not thought through, and the system wasn’t ready but was launched anyway. All the unions at the SMC agreed to an interim review because it was important to secure the inclusion of 360-degree evaluation, which has been a long-standing priority of the unions. The review of the new system is now being completed with an analysis of the rebuttal process.

Ms. Candace Alfred (Unit 13) raised a question about the cost-of-living allowance.

Ms. Gueziel stated that the Council should choose members to attend the SMC. Mr. Arauz stated that he would push for the maximum number of Council members to attend and would ask that it be flexible enough so that different members can attend different segments of the meetings.

5 Executive Board report

No comments.
6 Finances

Ms. Gueziel gave an update on the Relief Committee for Haiti: the bank account is operational, and a GoFundMe account has been set up. The payment of $5,000 to the account can be made this week.

Ms. Kathryn Kuchenbrod (Secretary) will follow up with Audit Committee/audit company regarding a quote for services.

Mr. Arauz gave some background on the purpose of the Staff Legal Assistance Fund in the budget. A large amount of money has been allocated for legal support for staff members for cases that involve issues such as termination or a change in conditions of service that may have broader repercussions for staff beyond the individual case. The Legal Assistance Committee was established by the 45th Staff Council to screen cases. They bring the cases (anonymously) to the Council and make recommendations. Legal assistance is restricted to dues-paying members, but it is essential to support all staff, so the rule should be changed. To date, two cases have been brought up to the Leadership. The Union has an agreement with the lawyer, Mr. George Irving, who works on an hourly rate up to a ceiling of $5,000 if a case goes to the Dispute Tribunal and a flat rate of $2,500 for an appeal. So far, the ceiling has never been reached. Members of the Legal Assistance Committee need to be chosen. Ms. Gueziel stated that she, as Treasurer, would like to be an ex-officio member of the Committee. Ms. Chindea stated that there are more than two cases, when including those initiated in the 46th Council, and the Council needs to be sure that that is taken into account in the budget. The President clarified that cases approved by the 46th Staff Council already had the funding allocated, so therefore would not draw from the 47th Council’s budget. It was decided that a new resolution regarding the Legal Assistance Committee would be discussed at the next Executive Board meeting and presented to the Council.

7 Resolution on “UNSU participation at the ICSC Working Group on Parental Leave, 27 September–1 October 2021”

Mr. Arauz presented a resolution on travel for himself to Turin, Italy, for the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) Working Group on Parental Leave, 27 September to 1 October 2021.

The policy on parental leave needs to be revised and it was agreed with UNISERV that Mr. Arauz would attend this meeting of the Working Group before the meeting of the SMC in Bonn, before returning to New York to take part in the virtual High-Level Committee on Management. In exchange he would give up going to the meeting about contractual modalities, but it was agreed that the Union will be closely connected on this issue. He stressed the value in this case of being there in person rather than attending virtually.
Mr. Rosario stated that it was very important to have subject matter experts attend meetings at the ICSC. Mr. Ovcharenko stated that it was important that the Staff Council be involved in what is discussed at the meetings, not just in approving funds for travel. The Council members need to understand how the federation represents us, and we need reports from the sessions. Ms. Chindea asked why only the President attends and stated that there should be more knowledge sharing with Council members. Ms. Tavora Jainchill noted that we should have a schedule of upcoming meetings so that we know what subjects will be discussed and which other unions will be attending. Mr. Arauz stated that the timing of meetings is out of our control, but it still important to appear in person when possible. He would push for as many experts and other members to attend, but slots have been drastically cut down and it’s not possible to send as many people as was the case in the past. Mr. Rosario stated that he would like clarification about how UNISERV operates. Mr. Arauz stated that because UNSU New York is one of only four unions in UNISERV, it was a great opportunity for us. The coming UNISERV Annual General Meeting would be a good opportunity to obtain clarity on UNISERV’s working procedures.

The resolution adopted, with 19 YES, 1 NO and 2 abstentions.

Adjourned at 15:10.