



Minutes/Actes:

Meeting No: 46/13
Date: 22 August 2019
Time: 13:15 - 14:30
Venue: Conf. Room E
Quorum: 09/17 Units

46th Staff Council Meeting Minutes

The meeting started without a quorum with 8 Units present at 13:35. Staff Council Deputy Chair Ramona Kohrs chaired the meeting and Secretary Sherif Mohamed took notes. Units present were: 06, 18, 21, 22, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33. Three members of the leadership team were in attendance.

1. Adoption of the agenda

Agenda was adopted.

2. Adoption of previous minutes

Minutes for meetings 9 and 12 were adopted with minor changes presented by the Deputy Chair and the 1st VP Aitor Arauz Chapman. Minutes for meetings 10 and 11 are pending.

3. President's Report and Summary of Communications

A copy of the President's Report was electronically shared with the Council members prior to the meeting. Leadership team went through the different activities mentioned in the report with emphasize on:

SMC VIII Staff Side Periodic meeting (VTC) - The 1st VP described the discussions that took place among the SMC members regarding the proposed updated version of ST/SGB/2008/5 and their final agreement that the document was acceptable, even though not all staff-side requests had been accepted. The new SGB is expected to be circulated soon. In this connection, the SMC members discussed the potential risk of retaliation against those who would report prohibited misconduct under the terms of the aforementioned updated SGB, and that the Organization's policy against retaliation could be interpreted as if it exclusively provided protection against retaliation to whistleblowers as identified under the terms of ST/SBG/2017/2. It was agreed that all forms of misconduct including retaliation are covered under the terms of the two policies and are prohibited by the two policies.

On a different topic, the 1st VP described the discussions regarding the proposed changes to the Staff Rules and Regulations which regulated mandatory deductions from payrolls in cases of judgements made against a staff member by local family courts. He explained that it will be further discussed on the SMC level.

The 1st VP also briefed the Council on the discussions regarding the proposed changes to the SGB on Gender Focal Points and shared concerns regarding the potential risks of the new rules for selection of the Gender Focal Points.

Meeting with ASG OHR on OCHA Decentralization - The President Patricia Nemeth briefed the Council on their meeting on this subject. More details on this subject will be discussed under reports from units.

The Assistant Treasurer Michelle Rockcliffe raised concerns regarding the selection of the Gender Focal Points and asked the 1st VP to elaborate more on this matter and questioned - on a different topic - the lack of an agenda item on a joint message that condemned the unfortunate events which took place at the meetings of the Pension Board in Nairobi, Kenya. The message was prepared by several sister unions. She emphasized the importance of this matter to the staff globally.

On the Pension Board matter, the 1st VP explained that the Leadership team received a request to broadcast the joint message from Ian Richards, the President of UNOG Staff Union. He further explained that even though the context of the message was accepted by UNSU, yet the Leadership team raised some concerns regarding the tone and the content of the message and therefore requested that certain fragments be reworded.

He also emphasized the importance of maintaining balanced communications that refrain from the use of any form of inaccurate or inappropriate content. The 1st VP pointed out some of the conflicting areas mentioned in the message and repeated that UNSU requested to make changes to the text, and that several other sister unions made similar request. He assured the Council that they are willing to revisit the text and broadcast a balanced version of the statement.

The Assistant Treasurer asked the Council to give the floor to Mr. Egor Ovcharenko (a former staff representative) to brief the Council on the pension fund matter. The Council agreed to give the floor to Mr. Ovcharenko. From his experience as a VP on Conditions of Service (CCISUA) Mr. Ovcharenko mentioned the long-standing conflict between the participant representatives and the fund representatives within the board. He referred to his statement before the Pension Board (see A/69/9) for further information on the conflict. The majority of the board members represent small funds and programmes which represented one third of the UN System participants, while the remaining two thirds of the

system (Secretariat staff) had a minority of seats on the board. He emphasized the importance of the participants' representative's requests for proper and balanced representation on the Board. He gave examples on the mistreatment that participants' representatives were subject to in the past, including escorting some of them out of the Pension Board meetings. He forewarned that similar behaviors apparently reoccur. He went on and listed the justified requests of the participants' representatives.

Winryck Ford (Unit 22) welcomed the other guests to the Council meeting, and asked to give the floor to one of them who have something to mention regarding the meetings of the Pension Board. He raised concerns regarding the joint statement and requested that the decision regarding broadcasting the statement be taken by the Council. The President agreed to distribute the statement to the Council members but re-emphasized that she will not share the document with staff-at-large with its current tone and content.

A guest staff member made further comments regarding the Pension Board meetings and attested that the type of behavior she witnessed was very biased in her personal opinion. She also commented on the unbalanced membership of the Board and pointed out the risks associated with such unbalance. She further mentioned that during an Audit of the Pension finances which was mandated by the GA – an audit that she witnessed – many comments made by the Pension officials included many factual mis-representation and unsubstantial allegations with no evidences at all. She also mentioned the yelling and noise made by some Pension Board members, as well as how participants representatives were deprived the opportunity to comment or interfere with items on the agenda of the Pension Board meetings.

Egor Ovcharenko described that the culture at the Pension Board meetings tolerates bullying to participants' representatives which, given its pattern, seemed to be intentional to deprive them the right to introduce their proposals, and that it is a very poisoned culture.

The Deputy Chair inquired about how the Pension Board works, how does the voting procedures take place, among other things. She also asked for further information on this important topic. She also suggested to have an 'information session' on the circumstances surrounding the Pension Board meetings to better understand the matter to be able to make informed reflections. She also mentioned that the Chair of the Board is responsible for running the meetings of the Board properly.

The Assistant Treasurer explained that representatives rotate on the position of the Chair of the Board, and repeated that the main issue here is that the majority of the board always intimidate the minority which represents the Secretariat duty stations. She also asked that staff reps and staff members support their participants' representatives after they are elected. She went on and described some of the other incidents occurred at the last board meeting, and praised the representatives of the SG for their professionalism in handling these mishaps.

The 1st VP emphasized that the Union fully supported the participants' representatives' position made at that meeting, yet he again objected to disseminating the joint statement with its current tone and content and explained why it is very important to maintain proper language and tone in our broadcasted messages to our constituents.

The President promised to share all the relevant information about these incidents with the Council members to decide on how to proceed on this matter.

4. Executive Board report

The Chair decided to skip this item as the report was submitted late. She asked that the report be submitted in a timely manner.

5. Staff Day Committee

The 2nd VP Francisco Brito briefed the Council on the timeline of the different activities of the Staff Day and the preparations made by different committees (sports, parade of nations, talent show, ball and raffle, food and drinks,). On the food and drinks, he mentioned that a decision will be made shortly by the Committee on the caterers of the food and that negotiations are ongoing for the drinks to be purchased with the assistance of his country's mission.

The rapporteur Coralie Tripier raised concerns regarding the raffle prize (fuel operated car). She suggested – for future Staff Day celebrations - replacing the regular fuel operated cars by electrical or hybrid ones, or even change the whole concept of having a car as the grand prize.

The 2nd VP took note of the rapporteur comments and mentioned that it was too late to be implemented this year because of the high cost of the electrical and hybrid cars.

The Assistant Treasurer Michelle Rockcliffe asked about the status of the screens bought by the Staff Union. She also raised concerns about the ending time of the Staff Day celebrations and asked that we announce an ending time beyond 10:00 pm even if the Council would have to pay overtime.

On the 'fuel efficient grand prize' Winryck Ford mentioned that he noticed a lot of plastic plants around the place that should be removed in alignment with the policy on the use of plastic in the UNHQ.

The 1st VP briefed the Council that the screens will be installed soon and described the material that is intended to be viewed on these screens which are being prepared. Regarding the ending time of the Staff Day events, the 1st VP mentioned that officials of the Events Management Office informed the Union that all Staff Day activities should be

concluded (officially) by 10:00 pm to avoid extra expenses in terms of cleaning, security, etc.

The Assistant Treasurer Michelle Rockcliffe objected to the administrative decision to end the events at 10:00 pm and said that the Organization should value their staff members (at least) for one day a year, even if they have to pay extra.

Winryck Ford mentioned that all events usually end at 11:00 pm. Assistant Secretary Sarah M'Bodji objected and gave examples of events that ended at 10:00 pm. The 1st VP mentioned that they can put 10:00 pm on the communications materials but may extend the partying a little beyond that time, but in all cases, the Union was bound to officially broadcast that 10:00 pm was the end-time of the event.

The Deputy Chair believed that 10:00 pm was not a good time to end such an event, but she left these decisions to the Organizers, bearing in mind that everything should be planned and secured from the administration perspective, and supported the opinion that the Staff Day should be an exception to honour the staff members of the Organization.

Different views were exchanged on this matter, yet 10:00 pm remained the official end time of the event as per the administration's instructions.

6. Reports by Units

Karina Loktionova (Unit 29) briefed the Council on a petition made in the Documentation Division regarding a P5 post which did not comply with the standard requirements of such posts. She also mentioned that they expect a meeting with the Director of the Division on this matter.

On the decentralization situation in OCHA, the 1st VP mentioned that the SG is seemingly using OCHA to test out his aspirations for a more agile organisation, because OCHA relies primarily on extrabudgetary funding and is therefore not subject to the same kind of oversight by the GA as other Secretariat Departments. The 1st VP explained how they made it clear in their meetings with OCHA managers that staff transfers without oversight or consultation could lead to selective and arbitrary decisions on the part of managers. He referred to a UNDT judgement that ruled against moving posts on a selective/arbitrary basis.

The Deputy Chair referred to an ST/SGB which instructed that staff reps should be involved in such post moves. She also raised concerns regarding the mandated consultations with staff reps before such decisions were made.

The 1st VP Mentioned that OCHA staff are currently under tremendous pressures because of this expected relocation and mentioned that UNSU and Geneva Staff Union promised

to handle this matter to the best they can. He also mentioned that under the new DoA policy, OCHA USG (head of entity) has the authority to make these post moves and mentioned that the Unions are working with HR on ensuring that the process won't be selective nor biased.

One of the examples of the expected move is moving the IT Unit to the Hague to be closer to their IT server centres. Another example is to have a 24 hours communications coverage by sending parts of the Communications Office to Istanbul, Bangkok. He further mentioned that the deadline for OCHA to submit its budget proposal is September 4th, and he expected that the decentralisation practice should be planned and decided before this date.

The Assistant Treasurer Michelle Rockcliffe asked to have a Union position based on ST/SGB/274 (*Consultations with staff reps at the Department level*) which applies in the OCHA case as well as in some Pension Board cases.

The Deputy Chair advised that affected OCHA staff may file a case with the UNDT on the lack of consultations with staff reps before making such intensive managerial decisions. She thought that if a group of staff filed an appeal against this decision, the case might turn into a class-action which might help resolve the situation.

The 1st VP agreed that UNDT is the best option, yet the Leadership team has consulted with OCHA Staff Reps, who believed that staff members were afraid of retaliation if they do so..

The Deputy Chair advised that staff could raise concerns regarding being subject to retaliation in cases when they approach the Internal Justice System. The Assistant Treasurer argued that this has been the case for so long that staff who approach the Justice System get alienated and abused for such actions and asked that the Unions gets stronger to be able to protect staff when they approach the justice systems.

7. AOB

No questions were raised.

The meeting adjourned at 15:05.
