



Minutes/Actes:

Meeting No: 46/18
Date: 10 October 2019
Time: 13:15 - 14:30
Venue: Conf. Room E
Quorum: 13/17 Units

46th Staff Council Meeting Minutes

The meeting was quorate with 10 Units present at 13:30. Staff Council Deputy Chair Ramona Kohrs chaired the meeting and Secretary Sherif Mohamed took notes. Units present were: 13, 14, 18, 21, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33. Three members of the leadership team were in attendance.

1. Adoption of the agenda

Agenda adopted without a change. An item on OCHA staff will be discussed under agenda item 6: "Reports from Units".

2. Adoption of previous minutes

Minutes 13 and 15 were adopted with the changes introduced by the 1st VP Aitor Arauz Chapman and Michelle Rockcliffe (Unit 6). The Secretary Sherif Mohamed informed the Council that further changes to the remaining minutes (10, 11, 14, 16, and 17) were also introduced. The Secretary will share the updated versions of the pending minutes with the Council members for adoption in the next meeting.

3. President's Report and Summary of Communications

The rapporteur Coralie Tripier inquired about the meeting of 10 October 2019 with the Controller, in light of the current financial situation. The President Patricia Nemeth answered that it was a general meeting which was scheduled prior to the financial situation news and that specific details about the financial situation will be discussed in the town-hall meeting with the Controller on Wednesday 16 October 2019.

The Deputy Chair Ramona Kohrs asked for more information about item no. 8 in the President's report regarding the meeting with the upcoming UNDT judges. The 1st VP mentioned that the discussion revolved around a proposed new structure and capacity planning of the UNDT judges, which he described as a rotating structure that is proposed to handle cases based on the "litigation load" in each duty station. The proposal didn't seem logical, however, he commended the meeting with the judges as well as their open conversation, which is expected to lead to further positive dialogues.

On OCHA decentralization, the 1st VP mentioned that the leadership team had a series of meetings with OCHA managers in an effort to catch-up on the consultations regarding the ongoing decentralization which did not take place prior to the decentralization decisions. He discussed the risk factors of the ongoing practice, which lacked proper regulations. The consultations resulted in an initial agreement of a “regulated framework” to help relocate staff to the proposed duty stations based on their different sets of skills, including language skills. It was also mentioned that OCHA management wish to conclude the decentralization process by January 2020.

On their meeting with the managers of the mediation services, the 1st VP informed the Council that the mediation service just got a new Chief, who described a new proposal which will - if implemented - place the mediation process in the queue with other compulsory steps (i.e. having to file an MEU appeal before proceeding to the UNDT). The 1st VP mentioned that several concerns were raised by UNSU as well as representatives from other sister Unions. The raised concerns included that even though mediation sounded like a good idea in addressing personal conflicts, it wouldn't be the same for more complicated conflicts and also expressed concerns regarding the possibility of retaliation against the complainant at the very early level of mediation. The Unions also expressed concerns regarding the paper trail of the formal process which can be used before the Tribunals, a process that is obsolete when it comes to “confidential” mediation. The 1st VP further informed the Council that the Unions are pushing back against this proposal. The Deputy Chair mentioned that managers usually refuse to go through the mediation process and that having mediation as a compulsory measure will only result in further delays to the formal process, and might derive negative effects to complainants.

The Assistant Secretary Sarah M'Bodji highlighted some of the negativities she witnessed while went through a mediation process in a case which involved a managerial decision not to renew the contracts of 4 DGACM staff members. She mentioned that it seemed to her as if management go to mediation just because they have to do so before they finally implement their contested decisions.

The 1st VP pointed out that the reasons of the tendency of managers to skip the mediation process might be owed to their perception that if they proceed to UNDT they will have an army of lawyers to back them up before the Court, and accordingly the mediation process might be perceived by them as a waste of time.

The Secretary asked for more details regarding the Leadership meeting with USG/DMSPC. The President informed the Council that USG/DMSPC met with the leadership team to discuss general matters including the MEU and G to P. She also informed the Council that USG/DMSPC will meet the DMSPC staff reps in the near future to discuss the Department's internal matters.

4. Executive Board report

The 1st VP updated the Council on the recruitment of the Union's Staff Assistant. He stated that a G-5 TJO and another announcement to hire interns were already published on Inspira. He invited Council members to encourage qualified internal staff to apply for the G5 post. The Deputy Chair asked if the Union would lead by example and financially support the interns. Her suggestion was supported by the President who promised that interns will receive 400 USD monthly as support from the Union.

5. Moving forward with the reformed Statutes and Regulations

The Secretary introduced the circulated draft statutes and regulations and mentioned the history of the work made by a group of talented staff members/staff representatives over the course of the 45th Staff Council. He suggested to have a one weekend day retreat, or alternatively a one authorized week day for all the Staff Representatives in order to discuss and agree on the final tune-ups that the draft still need. Karina Loktionova (Unit 29) mentioned that, given the austerity measures taken by her division, she didn't believe that she will be authorized to attend the proposed meeting if decided to take place in a weekday. The Council eventually agreed to dedicated the Council meeting which will take place on 7 November 2019 to discuss the circulated draft and agree on the way forward.

6. Reports by Units

The 1st VP briefed the Council about a meeting they had on 10 October 2019 with OCHA staff members, a meeting that was coordinated by a group of informal staff reps from OCHA. He mentioned that OCHA staff organized "informal" elections for all OCHA offices around the world to elect staff representatives to represent them during the ongoing decentralization practice in their areas. The 1st VP briefed the Council on the VTC meeting that he had with the newly elected OCHA staff reps, in which field Representatives inquired about what they should expect from NY and Geneva Unions regarding their current situation. He also mentioned that the newly elected OCHA staff reps asked for more details about their roles as staff representatives. The 1st VP promised to provide them materials on how to perform the representation duties. He commended the elections of the OCHA staff reps, and thought that similar practices might be the key to solve the dilemma of representing Secretariat staff serving away from Headquarters. He also informed the Council that the discussion included a proposal to establish some kind of a knowledge management platform - something similar to the virtual secretariat module introduced by CCISUA - to coordinate their work in a formal and organized manner. He thought that UNSU might benefit from such practices and build a solid hub where UNSU staff reps can share knowledge and work together seamlessly on different matters.

The Assistant Treasurer Yogesh Sakhardande suggested using SharePoint to facilitate this cause. The Assistant Secretary expected technical problems related to the limitations imposed by governments on Tech Companies when they impose sanctions on other countries, and that such limitations might lead to disruption of collaboration tools such as SharePoint, Google, Adobe Cloud, and more. She thought that other alternatives like Unit Connections/Docs, which are options owned and offered by the Organization can be used in such cases.

The Deputy Chair commended the informal elections conducted by OCHA staff and suggested to share this practice with the UN Information Centres around the world, who are basically a Secretariat staff who never enjoyed solid representation.

The 1st VP mentioned that this is a concern in many other departments and listed some of the problems faced by staff who serve away from Headquarters to address their concerns.

On a different matter, Ashley Rode (Unit 21) reported that one of her constituents complained about receiving text messages on their personal phones in the middle of the night, instructing them to finish assignments before 8 am. The 1st VP advised to escalate such instances and to point out that such behaviour is not acceptable, and if such practice persists, it might eventually turn into a class action.

The Deputy Chair condemned the practice of having staff members use their personal phones in business related activities, especially in cases when SMs telecommute and are obliged to use their personal devices to finish their work. The 1st VP mentioned a meeting they had with DPPA managers regarding the multiple-point authentication practice in which staff had to download a specific software to their personal phones and that during the meeting they explored the possibility of providing UN issued devices as a subsidy towards the savings made in terms of real-estate and utilities saved when staff member telecommute or move to flexible working areas. However, he explained that many staff don't prefer having multiple devices, which is contrary to the concept of receiving official devices.

In the same context, the 2nd VP Francisco Brito mentioned that they had a meeting with BTA (Business Transformation and Accountability), in which BTA conducted a presentation about the history of transformation in the UN and the future of accountability under the many new frameworks. The 2nd VP asked the officials from the BTA to consider presenting the same information to the Council in the near future.

On a different matter, the rapporteur Coralie Tripier reported that a manager refused a staff member request to be accompanied by their staff representatives in a scheduled meeting between the staff member and the manager. Jason Charles (Unit 13) mentioned that they had a previous similar incident and that he'll share with her some ST/SGBs that can be useful in handling this case. The Deputy Chair advised to use the Ethics Office

services to handle similar matters. The Secretary advised to escalate to DGACM Senior Managers who usually do not tolerate such incidents. the Rapporteur Coralie Tripier confirmed that this option is not yet being considered by the staff member.

Patel Noble (Unit 14) mentioned that they always advise their staff not to attend meetings with senior managers regarding controversial HR matters without having a staff representative present.

Assistant Secretary Sarah M'Bodji mentioned the issue of a DGACM staff who received a separation notice on disciplinary basis. She mentioned that, owed to the lack of an accompanying staff representative, the staff member signed papers that he did not know their purpose, which made it easier for management to separate the staff member. That was why she thought that staff reps should be present and are very much needed in such meetings/incidents.

The Assistant Secretary also mentioned the dissatisfaction of staff members regarding the austerity measures which included closing the DL at 17:00 to reduce the need for OT/CT for Security Staff, as well as the discontinuation of OT/CT in meeting services units and the introduction of staggered shifts.

Karina Loktionova mentioned that more serious matters were lately witnessed, in light of the financial situation, including denial of HL lumpsums, which was objected by the 2nd VP who reiterated that the Controller promised not to get close to the Staff entitlements by any means.

The Assistant Treasurer Yogesh Sakhardande raised an issue regarding a staff member who was denied the right to retire at her original retirement age (62) and was told that she had to resign in order to leave before turning 65. It was reiterated that it is the choice of the staff member to retire either when they turn 62 or 65, according to the relevant policy.

Lucelena Pimentel (Unit 32) mentioned other temporary measures taken by management such as ceasing all FMS operations before 8 am and after 6 pm to address the financial situation.

7. AOB

Nothing was reported.

The meeting adjourned at 14:50.
