



Minutes/Actes:

Meeting No: 46/28
Date: 23 January 2020
Time: 13:15 - 14:30
Venue: Conf. Room C
Quorum: 14/17 Units

46th Staff Council Meeting Minutes

The meeting was quorate at 13:30 with 14 Units present. Staff Council Chair Camille McKenzie chaired the meeting and Secretary Sherif Mohamed took notes. Units present were: 06, 13, 14, 17, 18, 21, 22, 24, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33. All members of the leadership team were in attendance.

1. Adoption of the agenda

Two additional items on “Review of recent draft ST/AIs” and “Young UN” were added as items (7) and (8). Agenda was adopted as amended with 10 items.

2. Adoption of previous minutes

Minutes for the 26th and 27th meetings were still pending.

3. President's Report and Summary of Communications

Michelle Rockcliffe (Unit 06) requested more information on item no. (5) of the president's report regarding a meeting with ASG/OHR in relation to a whistle-blower case. She also requested more information regarding a letter sent to the Permanent Representative of the United States before the UN concerning the delays in issuance of G-4 visas and other related issues such as driving licenses in New Jersey.

The President Patricia Nemeth explained that, given the confidentiality of the case, it wasn't possible to share any information regarding the whistle-blower case.

Regarding G-4 visas, the President indicated that the letter was also confidential and that its content couldn't be made public. The 1st Vice President Aitor Arauz Chapman invited staff representatives who were interested in this topic to inspect the letter at the Union's office.

4. Executive Board Report

There were no EB meeting this week.

5. UNSU Finances

The President informed the Council that the Controller approved a payment of USD 28,000 to reimburse the Union for the cost of hiring the Union's temporary staff assistant.

6. Extension of the contract of the Union's Staff Assistant

The 1st VP informed the Council that he discussed the proposed extension with the Union's temporary staff assistant. During the discussion, the staff assistant confirmed that she was not willing to renew the current contract. However, she confirmed that she would be available to support the Union whenever needed. He also stated that her last day on the current contract is 6 February 2020.

The 2nd VP Francisco Brito suggested that the Union organize an event to bid her farewell and to thank her for her services during the past 8 months.

The 1st VP also informed the Council that the Leadership received an additional internal application during the extended period of the TJO, whom was not suitable for the advertised post. He confirmed that, based on a previous interview of one of the former candidates, the candidate was recommended, and the final stages of the recruitment process was currently ongoing.

7. Review of recent draft ST/AIs

Sergio Pires Vieira (Unit 24) explained that the reason why he suggested the addition of this item to the agenda was to understand the rationale behind the proposed changes to the draft ST/AIs on "termination of appointment", "termination of appointment for unsatisfactory service" and "expiration of appointment" and why they were identified to be problematic. He asked the leadership to further clarify the matter.

The 1st VP thought that the timing of the review/issuance of such ST/AIs amid deep concerns regarding the current downsizing exercises and in lack of a proper downsizing policy was a matter of concern. He explained that the UNSU along with other sister Unions requested that any review process of such ST/AIs can be possible only after the conclusion of the ST/AI on downsizing.

The 1st VP stated that the point on "expectation of renewal" of fixed-term contracts was subject to previous UNDT judgements that introduced certain nuances. The Administration

should not attempt to use an ST/AI to limit the scope of protection offered by the Staff Rules. He also mentioned that even though comments were made on the ST/AIs by the UNSU's lawyer and members of other sister Unions, he thought that feedback on such policies by our Council members were critical and called for using a collaborative tool to facilitate sharing ideas among the Council members on such matters. The Assistant Secretary Sarah M'Bodji suggested to use Microsoft Teams to comment on such policies in a collaborative manner.

Michelle Rockcliffe thought that adopting a Council resolution was the best way to communicate the Union's position on such matters. She explained that Council resolutions provide mandates to the Leadership team to act on different matters. On the matter at hand, she raised concerns regarding the acquired rights of staff members with fixed-term contract, and that such contracts might be easily terminated according to the proposed changes. She also raised serious concerns about the changes which might lead to the possibility of terminating the contract of a staff member who falls sick, which defies the principles of the disability inclusion. The 1st VP explained that this part was found to be problematic and that it was one of the issues that resulted in the decision to bring the whole matter before the SMC to be discussed further.

The Secretary Sherif Mohamed supported the use of Microsoft Teams as a collaboration tool and asked the Assistant Secretary to present the software's different options to the Council as part of the training/development plan.

The Secretary further explained that he was against adopting a resolution at that time because he believed it was unnecessary to alarm staff members with draft policies which were still being considered at the SMC level, and might eventually be null.

Kathryn Kuchenbrod (Unit 31) requested a comparison between the old and proposed ST/AIs to facilitate browsing the proposed changes.

The 1st VP explained that his initial email to the Council contained the ST/AIs under question in a "track-changes" mode. The other ST/AI's in his same email were newly introduced and should be looked into as a whole.

Michelle Rockcliffe requested that leadership team keep the Council informed with any updates in the work of the SMC. She commented on the lack of official communications from the leadership team to indicate that the review was suspended and that the ST/AIs were diverted to be handled within the SMC. She asked that such information be included in the President's report.

The Rapporteur Coralie Tripier stated that even with the tracked-changes she found that the documents were confusing and called for a more streamlined way in dealing with such reviews.

The President said she would find ways to simplify such documents in the future.

The 1st VP praised the interest of the Council in this matter and seconded the President's commitment to simplify this kind of documents. Regarding the lack of information, he stated that he shared a message with the whole Council with updates regarding the ST/AIs and mentioned that it was also brought to the attention of the EB members in an informal meeting (this week's meeting was informal because of the lack of a quorum). In his email and through the informal discussions of the EB, the 1st VP explained that Vienna Staff Union requested - in an official letter to the President of the SMC (which was attached to the 1st VP's email) - to suspend the review and bring the whole matter to the SMC. Given the slow pace of the SMC processes, the 1st VP thought that the Council had enough time to inspect the documents carefully.

The Assistant Secretary Sarah M'Bodji condemned the introduced changes to the ST/AIs as they defied the purpose of the SG's recent Disability Inclusion Strategy and called for the Council to look carefully for similar contradictions in any upcoming review of other ST/AIs.

The 1st VP appreciated the Assistant Secretary's point and stated that highlighting such contradictions was exactly what he expected from the Council. He also stated that similar comments from the Council members would open horizons for the Leadership team to respond to such changes/policies in the discussions of the SMC. He also criticized the way these changes were presented without proper consultations with the Staff Unions.

Sergio Pires Vieira said that even though the policy was on hold, it was necessary that the Council look into it carefully. He also thought that staff-at-large should be somehow informed about the attempts to change their working conditions. He thought it would be good to identify what exactly is at stake and prepare well to be able to deal with such policy changes. He also thought that sharing such information would give the staff-at-large an idea of the work of the Council.

Michelle Rockcliffe reemphasized the importance of the Council's resolutions. She also highlighted that having a specific policy on the termination of staff members with permanent contracts was – in her opinion – a way to get rid of the “agreed terminations” option. She thought that it was the Council's responsibility to prepare for this fight by adopting the presented resolution.

Sergio Pires Vieira called for the Council not to take any action until the Council inspect the presented documents carefully. Once done, he suggested to adopt a strong Council resolution in this regard.

The President asked the Council to respect the proper consultations mechanism, and to refrain from spreading unconfirmed information to avoid any unnecessary panic among

the staff. She also underscored the importance of the relationships between UNSU and other sister Unions, which she thought might be negatively affected if UNSU adopt a resolution with a final position, while the same issues were still being discussed among all the other Unions. She underscored the importance of having a globally unified position on such controversial issues, which plays a great role in supporting the case before management at the SMC.

Regarding the time-frames, the 1st VP explained that he didn't expect any developments in this regard before at least 3 months from now and asked not to rush with resolutions while we still have time to carefully inspect the presented documents.

Lucelenia Pimentel (Unit 32) thought that the Council needed no less than 30 days to carefully look into this matter.

Sergio Pires Vieira seconded Lucelenia's idea and called for the Council members to carefully read and analyse the documents and to keep the discussion going.

Patel Noble (Unit 14) supported the call for enough time to allow the Council to carefully analyse the documents. He thought that choosing the right time for such announcements was critical to avoid unnecessary panic among staff. Once the problems were identified, the Council can proceed with an action that can include adopting a resolution.

Michelle Rockcliffe made a motion to adopt the resolution as soon as possible and to include the item on the agenda until a Council decision was made within 30 days. Motion was seconded.

The Council voted on the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously.

8. Young UN

The President had noticed that Young UN were invited to a number of meetings with senior management, and she raised concerns that the representatives of that group might be discussing issues which might contradict with the Union's mission. She expressed deep concerns that some of their ideas introduced negative effects on the acquired rights of the staff-at-large.

The Secretary mentioned that he attended one of the Young UN meetings, and he found their discussions mostly interesting. He mentioned that he found many useful ideas and initiatives in their recently published report "Navigating to the Next UN", and called for the Council to observe their work and consider a cooperative approach with them to avoid any conflicts of interests. He mentioned that he invited one of their representatives to attend one of the Council meeting to start a dialogue between the Group and the Council, yet he didn't receive any confirmation.

Sergio Pires Vieira mentioned that he attended the same meeting which the Secretary attended, and he didn't feel that the group was open to cooperate with the Staff Union. However, he thought that it wasn't proper to judge them and underscored some of their ideas, which introduced some major changes that he found complicated and asked that members of the Council observe their work to learn more about their initiatives.

Michelle Rockcliffe thought that the Council needed to adopt resolutions on such matters. She reemphasized that adopting resolutions was the only way to strengthen the Union and make its work visible.

Ashley Rode (Unit 21) mentioned that she was involved with the Young UN group and she attended some of their meetings. She thought that communication and ideation were very easy amongst the group, simply because they were not aware of all the complicated rules and regulations, which gave them space to innovate.

The 2nd VP thought that some of the Group's ideas were dangerous because of the potential negative impact of such ideas/initiatives – which might seem attractive to management in the context of reform and/or saving money – on the acquired rights of the staff. He gave an example, which is included in the Group's publication mentioned above, when they suggested to downgrade travel entitlements for long flights, which he thought was not possible given the nature of the work of the United Nations staff who might have to start working right after they arrived at their destinations.

The Assistant Secretary believed that we should keep an eye on the group, and we must start reforming our practices to be able to follow their fast pace. She thought that we – as a Union – were falling way behind this group, which she thought was very dangerous for the future of the work of the Union

Patel Noble thought that young generations are the future and that it was normal that their voices be heard. Yet he also emphasized the critical importance of the “experience” factor when it comes to the implementation of any idea/initiative. He stated that imposing our policies or trying to control the Group was not a good idea.

Lucelenia Pimentel thought that it made a lot of sense that management get this group involved in their ideation process because they simply made everything easier to implement while the Union always pushed back most of the introduced ideas and always blocked their way. She called for the Council to be more innovative and flexible in order to remain relevant and keep a strong influence on the implementation of the reform plan in the Organization.

The 1st VP thought that regardless how attractive their ideas were, they still needed to follow the due process, which will always be in place, and that we should not be afraid of

ideas/innovation and that it would be better to guide the Group to follow such due processes.

9. Reports by Units

Ashley Rode raised the issue of the Broadcast regarding the changes to the General Service and Related categories salary scales. She mentioned that she was approached by constituents who failed to understand the many changes in their payslips, including the deduction of their gross salaries.

The Assistant Secretary explained that there were a Working Group on “staff assessment” and “taxation”, which tries to understand and analyse both elements in order to be able to present recommendations to the management and to the ICSC. She invited staff reps to join the work of the Group.

10. AOB

In connection with a case in her Unit, Lucelenia Pimentel inquired about the duration for which a staff member remains under investigation by OIOS and protested that one of her constituents have been under investigation for over a year.

The President and the 2nd VP explained that in such cases, duration of investigations was related to the nature of the case. However, she confirmed that such cases usually take years to be addressed.

On a different note, Sebastian Cervantes (Unit 22) thanked the Leadership for their prompt response regarding the conflicts in the application of the FWA policy and informed the Council that as a result the issue was eventually addressed.

The meeting adjourned at 14:50.
