



Resolution

Resolution No.: 47/65

Special meeting No.: 47/7

Date: 13 December 2023

Resolution on Flexible Workspace at United Nations Headquarters

The 47th Staff Council,

Recalling its resolution 47/29 on the Next Normal, dated 30 June 2022;

Reiterating its appreciation for the issuance of the Secretary-General's plan for the Next Normal¹;

Noting the findings and recommendations of the 25 July 2023 report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) on the *Evaluation of the implementation of a flexible workplace at United Nations Headquarters*²;

Noting that in its report the OIOS found that "there was no noticeable improvement in staff productivity directly attributable to the implementation of the flexible workplace"³ and further noting, with concern, that this "may have negatively contributed to staff health and well-being"⁴;

Noting that the concerns expressed in the OIOS reports were echoed by several Member States⁵;

Noting that several independent and credible studies in the past years have found that open office-space arrangements are not effective, and that several private sector organizations have reverted to cubicles or closed office space⁶;

¹ Document entitled "Next Normal – Reimagining how we work @ UNHQ", circulated to New York-based staff by the Secretary-General on 31 March 2022.

² A/78/225.

³ Idem, page 11.

⁴ Idem. As noted in the OIOS report, "Forty-two per cent of survey respondents reported that working in a flexible workplace had a negative impact on their health and well-being" (paragraph 52) in a context where "22 per cent of staff at Headquarters reported mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and burnout, and 18 per cent reported back pains" (paragraph 57). Several Member States have echoed these con

⁵ See: *Flexible Workplace Arrangements Negatively Impacting Staff, Speakers Warn as Fifth Committee Reviews Projects to Improve Working Conditions, Conference Facilities*, 9 November 2023, GA/AB/4435.

⁶ See, for example: David Brooks, *The Immortal Awfulness of Open Plan Workspace*, New York Times, 8 September 2022; Ethan Bernstein and Ben Waber, *The Truth About Open Offices*, Harvard Business Review, November – December 2019; and Oleg Borodin, *The Open Office Is Out, 'Seated Privacy' Is In as Cubicles Make a Comeback*, Wall Street Journal, 15 September 2022.

Emphasizing the critical importance of the views and experience of staff on flexible workspace arrangements at United Nations Headquarters and further emphasizing that only 30 per cent of staff who responded to a survey conducted by the Staff Union in March and April 2022 were in favour of maintaining existing flexible open plan, hot desking or shared workplace arrangements;

Noting with concern that despite the above-mentioned OIOS report, flexible workspace arrangements are currently being expanded by Management;

Noting that current open-space arrangements, which were designed prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, are not fully compatible with new methods of work, particularly video-conference meetings needs;

Noting that the Organization needs to fully consider the views and experience of concerned staff and, as such, these are reflected in the present resolution as the official position of UNSU-NY for New York-based staff on the issue of flexible workspace;

Noting the findings in the OIOS report that there were significant savings on leases due to flexible hot-desking workplace arrangements “resulting in net savings of \$26.8 million as at 31 December 2022” and that the “planned non-renewal of the DC-1 lease in 2023 is expected to bring additional savings of \$9.6 million per annum calculated at the rate of the lease that ended in March 2023”⁷;

Noting that the above-referenced savings were achieved to the detriment of the safety, health and staff well-being of United Nations Secretariat personnel, including by over-suscribing the initial planned ceiling of floor occupancy on many floors in the Secretariat building;

Recalling that the safety, health and well-being of all United Nations Secretariat personnel as well as a conducive work environment should be a paramount consideration for the determination of any work-related arrangements by the Organization;

The Staff Council hereby,

1. *Reiterates* the recommendation expressed in paragraph 7 of its resolution 47/29 that all flexible open-plan, hot-desking and shared workplace arrangements be phased out and replaced with cubicles or private offices;
2. *Reiterates* its recommendation expressed in paragraph 8 of its resolution 47/29 that funds be allocated to improve workspaces;
3. *Calls* for the cancellation of any plans to expand flexible open-plan, hot-desking and shared workplace arrangements, given all of the above;
4. *Calls* on Management to consult with the Staff Union when preparing reports to the Secretary-General on the issue of flexible workspace and to take into consideration the findings of Staff Union surveys and resolutions in this regard;
5. *Instructs* the Leadership to initiate an online petition open to all New York-based staff in line with paragraphs 1 to 3 above;

⁷ *Supra*, paragraph 17.

6. *Instructs* the leadership to commission a study, to be completed no later than 1 April 2024, by a credible organization on the issue of flexible workplace arrangements at United Nations Headquarters, in close consultation with New York-based staff, Management and other stakeholders. Such a study should be informed by the best practices and lesson learned in the public and private sectors;

7. *Instructs* the Leadership to share this resolution with the members of the Occupational Safety and Health Committee at Headquarters, as well as with the Chef de Cabinet, the Under-Secretaries-General of the Department of Management Strategy, Policy and Compliance, the Department of Operational Support and the Department for Safety and Security, as well as the Assistant-Secretary-General of the Office of Human Resources and all heads of offices/departments represented in the Staff Council; and

8. *Further instructs* the Leadership to circulate this resolution via an email broadcast to all members of the United Nations Staff Union.

Adopted	X
For	9
Against	0
Abstention	0