47th Staff Council Meeting Minutes

The meeting was quorate at 13:25 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

The agenda was adopted.

2. Adoption of Minutes

Minutes for meetings 47/11 and 47/12 were adopted.

3. Reports by units

Ms. Jerah Kirby (Unit 27) raised the issue of flexible work arrangements. Some staff members have reported that they have been turned down by or have received no answer from DHMOSH about requests for medical exemptions. In the Documentation Division, some managers are refusing to grant leave on the day that a staff member is scheduled to be in the office. Staff members are also being told that if their in-office day falls on a holiday they would have to make up the in-office day on another day that week. She has not been able to get clarity from the Executive Office.

Mr. Ken Rosario (Unit 15) spoke on the Staff Management Committee (SMC) working groups on investigations. He volunteered to participate in the working group. He also stated that he had received numerous emails from female staff members in Afghanistan who are having to stay in hiding. He will have a meeting on 5 November with senior management. Regarding the Panel of Experts, they are still being mistreated overseas and are being ignored by the administration, and they still need assistance. The Union still has an obligation to look out for these staff.
Ms. Gueziel stated that she had received inquiries from staff members about the pre-retirement workshops. They are being directed to documents that aren’t available on the website. They are asking for the Staff Union to conduct workshops once or twice a year.

Ms. Ellen Alradi (Unit 10) stated that managers have a lot of leeway in implementing the return to premises. Some managers were requiring lists of attendance every week. Some managers are very flexible. More restrictive guidance could be detrimental. Managers have received lists of staff members who have not reported their vaccination status in EarthMed, and they are being told to get in touch with staff members about this issue. Some staff members are confused as to what is required.

Ms. Kirby stated that some staff members don’t feel safe and don’t want to come in at all. Managers are taking the position that unless there is a medical exemption, then staff members must come in one day a week. One staff member has been put on special leave without pay, so the issue is becoming serious in several cases.

Ms. Beverley Medas (Unit 9) stated that one staff member was on certified sick leave was told to make up a work day. Some managers are abusing their authority.

Ms. Barbara Tavora Jainchill (Unit 25) addressed Ms. Kirby’s issue regarding the mandate to report status. The mandate does not include disclosing medical information. The behaviour of management is a very serious problem. The Staff Representative needs to get involved if managers are telling colleagues that they have to make up a certified sick leave day or other misuse of their authority. Ms. Gueziel stated that inventing a rule about making up a certified sick leave day is illegal. It is not in any of the human resources guidance or the ST/AI.

Mr. Mostafa Ibrahim (Unit 26) advocated for non-essential staff to work from home five days a week.

Ms. Alradi stated that the Executive Office said that managers were told that they could ask for a staff member’s vaccination card, and the legal advisers and the Division of Healthcare Management and Occupational Safety and Health (DHMOSH) said that it was acceptable. Ms. Gueziel stated that the Office of Human Resources (OHR) is not doing their job. Staff members are being given contradictory instructions.

Mr. Aitor Arauz (President) summarized the contents of the mandate and reiterated that the status reported in EarthMed is strictly confidential. However, managers can ask the status for operational reasons, but it has to be done discretely and it has to be relevant to the staff member’s job. Regarding flexible working arrangements, any further extrapolation from the guidance is not in the rules. OHR is being very loose with the rules, allowing a lot of flexibility. Managers have the final say when it comes to approving flexible working arrangements. They can override a determination by Medical Services. Anything that deviates from these guidelines is not appropriate. Without consulting the Operational
Safety and Health (OSH) committee, the Secretary-General’s office has decided that we are going back to the standard telecommuting arrangement. He stated that OHR said that the Administration was coming under a lot of pressure from the Member States, who object to the empty space in the rented buildings. This is particularly an issue during the Fifth Committee session, which is why this decision couldn't be delayed until the beginning of January. Staff Representatives should reach out to Leadership if Executive Offices or managers are doing something wrong.

Ms. Gueziel agreed to step down and give Mr. Rosario the seat on the SMC working group on investigations.

The President stated that he would follow up on the situation with the female staff members in Afghanistan and would escalate the issue if necessary. He also addressed the issue of pre-retirement training. That would probably be the next event planned, and the Leadership would need to decide who would speak. The Executive Board will discuss the planning.

Ms. Alradi stated that many staff members in DC1 and DC2 have small offices, but in the Secretariat transmission is a much bigger risk.

Mr. Rosario stated that the Staff Council previously passed resolutions about the open-space office environment. Perhaps they could be shown to the OSH committee.

4 President’s report and summary of communications

The President reminded the Council members to review the posted draft ST/AIs in Teams.

Mr. Egor Ovcharenko (Unit 28) raised the issue of lump sum payments for home leave travel, and it could be detrimental for staff members.

Ms. Gueziel asked for clarification on the mention of the six official and other languages. The President stated that he would get back to her.

Regarding the lump sum, the President stated that it would be calculated on the least restrictive official fares. The administration implied that this was a plan to standardize the system, cutting down on administrative costs and possibly benefiting staff. We need to look at the issue in more detail. Mr. Ovcharenko noted that there have been problems with lump sum payments in the past.

The President stated that he would share the SMC documents as soon as they are available.
5  EB report

No comments.

8  Finances

Ms. Gueziel (Treasurer) had nothing to report regarding finances.

Ms. Kathryn Kuchenbrod (Secretary) gave an update on the Audit Committee, noting that the term of the two existing members had expired and we would need to have an election soon. The President stated that it has been difficult to find willing members. He will send out a call for nominations. We may need to try to extend the term of the existing members.

8  General Meeting

The President summarized the main items on the agenda. Traditionally, the Staff Union also introduces a resolution at the General Meeting of a political nature that is important to staff. COVID-19 might be tricky to address at this point. It also may be difficult to present a resolution in a virtual environment. We need to decide whether to use Zoom or Teams and whether we want the General Meeting to be more procedural or more political.

Ms. Gueziel stated that the Administration should be able to provide a platform for the General Meeting. If that’s not possible, Zoom meetings for a large number of people is expensive. Ms. Tavora Jainchill noted that Zoom was currently offering discounts and she would pass the information on the Leadership. Mr. Ovcharenko questioned whether the use of Teams or Zoom was allowed for in the Statute. He stated that we could save political resolutions for a later meeting.

The President stated that it would be better to have the General Meeting after the results of the COVID-19 survey, which closes on 4 November. It was decided to have a special meeting of the Staff Council on 10 November in advance of the General Meeting on 11 November. Mr. Stephane Jean (Unit 11) suggested sharing the results of the survey with staff before the General Meeting.

Mr. Rosario suggested that we send the resolutions to the staff so they can see the work of the Union.

9  Return to premises

Ms. Gueziel stated that staff are generally very happy with the survey. She requested regular updates on responses to the survey rather than waiting until the last day so that we can prepare. Mr. Jean stated that the Council’s position on return to premises should be linked to objective criteria, based on data and science. The primary concern should be staff safety, and it is important to share data on breakthrough cases.
Mr. Rosario stated that he had had a meeting with the Medical Director about the Department of Safety and Security (DSS) and the General Assembly. The Medical Director doesn’t refer to any data from the World Health Organization or the Host Country, so it is not clear where he is getting his information. More than 50 security officers within the last year contracted the virus, and one died, but there was no contact tracing done. He would like this issue to be brought up at the OSH committee.

The President stated that the reply from DHMOSH was that there was no way to know how the officers got the virus. He will share with the Council the PowerPoint that was presented at the last meeting of the OSH committee. He stated that the party line continues to be that there are very few transmissions at work, but we have no way of knowing that because we don’t have any data. He would continue to press on this point.

Mr. Rosario suggested that the lack of written data from the Administration should be brought up at the General Meeting.

Ms. Alradi reiterated the need for action regarding the open flexible workspace, as it is having a big psychological impact on staff. Masking is an issue, and should be up to individual staff members to enforce. The President stated that anything to do with architectural changes costs a lot of money. It’s not realistic to ask the Administration to redesign those spaces, and so we need to focus on how to manage safety in the space we have. We have the chance to have an internal conversation rather than a General Assembly mandate since the original plan is now closed and additional changes can be decided at the level of the Secretary-General.

9 Review of the Statute

Review of the Statute was under way, and weekly meetings would be taking place on Tuesdays from 12 to 1.

11 AOB

Ms. Gueziel asked about the status of the invitation to Ms. Alicia Lovell-Squires, formerly of the Arbitration Committee, to address the Council. Mr. Sebastian Cervantes (Chair) stated that he would follow up with her.

*Adjourned: 12:58 EDT*