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Report by the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association

Introduction

1. Since June 2004, the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association (USSA) has reported annually to the Programme Coordinating Board. Following a request made at the 28th Programme Coordinating Board meeting, the USSA presented an additional report and statement to the Board at its 29th meeting in connection with the human resources-related recommendations of the Second Independent Evaluation, the workforce functional review, and ongoing change processes taking place within UNAIDS. The USSA is grateful for the additional opportunities for dialogue and engagement at this moment in the Organization's history. At the time of writing this report, the USSA Executive Committee is preparing for its annual, five-day face to face meeting, where among other things it will review findings of a recently completed USSA Staff Survey and discuss these with senior management and the Executive Director. This document highlights key developments since December 2011 and will be complemented by an oral presentation to the Board by the USSA Chair.

Implementation of the UNAIDS Workforce Functional Review – “Shaping our Destiny”

2. Since the presentation of the USSA's last report to the Board, the UNAIDS transformation process has moved into its implementation phase – “Shaping our Destiny”. The USSA Executive Committee met with the Executive Director on 1 March 2012 to receive an update and discuss the implementation process. From this exchange, it was very clear to the Executive Committee that the Executive Director had closely reviewed all the comments, concerns, questions and ideas that had been raised by staff, management and partners around the world. The personal investment of time and energy spent on the part of the Executive Director to ensure a “human face” to the change process was evident. We think such an approach is highly beneficial to staff and the Organization – significantly reducing the transaction costs, preserving morale, minimizing anxiety to the greatest extent possible, and enabling staff to focus on delivering results. While there were delays to the timeline originally proposed to staff in December 2011 – thus placing pressure on people due to be on Mobility and Reassignment this year, particularly those with families – the USSA Executive Committee communicated to staff its view that the additional efforts to refine the process and final decisions appeared to be in the interest of staff and the Organization as a whole.
3. At present, the large scale mobility exercise underway includes nearly 15 per cent of the Secretariat's workforce. The USSA was pleased to see adaptations for the present exercise which created opportunities for headquarters staff – in the context of strengthening the Organization's country focus – to apply to the mobility exercise on a voluntary basis. Qualified General Service staff have been given the opportunity to be considered for International Professional positions – enabling staff members to seek new professional challenges within UNAIDS, and enabling UNAIDS to retain skills, dedication and institutional memory. Concern was expressed that country-based staff in offices which may be reduced in size or closed in the future were not given an opportunity to be considered in the present exercise. The USSA is advocating for clarity on future country level staffing to be reached prior to the next mobility exercise, and for staff in affected offices to be eligible for inclusion in mobility and given priority consideration in any recruitment and selection processes outside of the mobility exercise.

4. The offer of separation by mutual agreement was well-received by staff, and we have been informed that more than 30 applications were approved by the Executive Director. The USSA has expressed its appreciation for the strong commitment of management to including such mechanisms which reduce negative impacts on staff and the Organization, and at the same time achieve the necessary flexibility and economies for UNAIDS. We look forward to seeing a procedure published to support the operationalization of voluntary part-time working arrangements, where these are in the interest of both staff and the Organization.
5. At the time of submitting this report in early May, the USSA was preparing for its participation in the Mobility and Reassignment Committee to finalise a set of recommendations to the Executive Director on placement of staff. Final decisions are due to be communicated to staff members by June, and relocations are generally expected to take place in the following two to three months. The USSA is pleased that, under the revised Mobility policy published in February 2012, the exercise will begin earlier in the future (by end-September instead of end-January), enabling staff members to learn of their new placement at a much earlier date, and as such, be better able to professionally and personally prepare for their move.
6. In its statement to the Board in December 2011, the USSA highlighted the following six key outcomes vis-à-vis its expectations for the organization by the end of 2012:
 - i. We have used all available measures to protect and retain current staff members that the organisation has invested in; in doing so, we avoid needless costs related to “workforce adjustment” and separation of staff.
 - ii. We have articulated and used fair and transparent processes, in line with the Staff Regulations and Rules, and as a result, achieved “Zero Litigation” in the context of workforce adjustment.
 - iii. Any staff member facing separation from UNAIDS and in need of work has been given career support, including coaching, outplacement and professional development opportunities. The “human face approach” takes into account a staff member’s individual and family circumstances in negotiating a termination package.
 - iv. We have optimised the use of each staff member’s skills and experience, and we have invested to expand them so UNAIDS keeps up with the challenges and opportunities in front of us.
 - v. Our structure and approach enhances agility, collaboration and innovation; colleagues share knowledge and expertise easily, reach out, build solutions together across the Organization.
 - vi. We have seized the opportunity to get our house in order – for example, becoming the first UN entity to say confidently that all people performing staff functions have a staff contract.
7. The USSA recognizes that most if not all organizational change processes will leave at least some individuals adversely affected, and it is to be expected that this will also be the case in UNAIDS. While for some of our hoped-for outcomes it is too early to judge progress, at this stage we consider the transformation process to be overall “on track”. Greater detail will be shared in our oral statement to the Board also taking into

account analysis of the recent USSA Staff Survey. We are confident that all efforts are being made to ensure that this organizational transformation is done in a manner that minimises negative individual impacts, and maximises our collective impact as staff for the HIV response.

Addressing concerns about WHO Staff Health Insurance

8. Last year the USSA reported that staff transferring to UNAIDS contracts in the context of the Single Administrative System had expressed serious concerns about the poor quality of service offered by the WHO Staff Health Insurance (SHI) in terms of the lack of recognition at local level (and as a result, high out-of-pocket expenditures or complicated pre-payment negotiation), long delays in reimbursement, and outdated, paper-based claim procedures. The USSA continues to receive reports from staff encountering such difficulties. The hardships reported by national officers are particularly severe. We were pleased to be able to discuss this situation with the Executive Director earlier this year, and to hear his commitment to finding a durable solution. We look forward to our upcoming discussions with senior management about progress and how we can support these efforts.

Conclusion

9. The USSA continues to enjoy a constructive and fruitful dialogue with senior management and the Executive Director. Such dialogue is beneficial at any moment in an organization's history, but it can be a particularly invaluable asset at a time of transformation and realignment. Staff support the vision of the Executive Director and look forward to making this change process produce maximum benefit for people living with and affected by HIV around the world. If we "stay the course" – maintaining dialogue as we go – we are confident that we can emerge stronger and will inspire similar transformation processes in other organizations, within and beyond the UN.