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Report of the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association

INTRODUCTION

1. Since June 2004, the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association (USSA) has reported annually to the Programme Coordinating Board. This document serves as complimentary information to the oral presentation that will be made to the Board by the USSA Chair. The USSA functions as an independent staff association for the UNAIDS Secretariat, while remaining an Associate Member of the WHO Staff Association, and, since 2008, a full member of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA).

UNAIDS WORKFORCE FUNCTIONAL REVIEW

2. At the time of writing this report, the UNAIDS Secretariat is entering the next phase of its workforce functional review (Regional Support Teams and Geneva headquarters), following the first phase which focused on country office functions and staffing. This functional review is a very important step in the ongoing evolution of UNAIDS, in the context of the recommendations of the Second Independent Evaluation, and the adoption of the UNAIDS Strategy 2011-2015, "Getting to Zero". The USSA supports change that enables UNAIDS to be "fit for purpose" in an evolving environment and a UNAIDS workforce that can produce the greatest possible support to countries towards realising our vision of Zero new infections, Zero discrimination and Zero AIDS-related deaths.
3. The USSA recognises that the new UNAIDS Strategy sets forth a very ambitious agenda that necessitates a transformation in how we work. While we can and must strive for greater impact and greater cost-effectiveness, we are nevertheless concerned about possible scenarios involving reductions in staff numbers. We note that many staff report excessive workloads and mounting pressure to respond to growing expectations. In such situations, demanding "more with less" would be highly unrealistic – unsustainable at best and harmful to staff and the Organisation at worst. The USSA believes that any consideration of a reduction in force cannot take place without a corresponding adjustment in expectations. With regards to the possible outsourcing and/or off-shoring of some functions, we are aware of examples of analysis in other organisations that, when performed superficially to focus narrowly on cost, can lead to decisions that have damaging implications for both staff and the Organization.
4. The USSA believes that a successful change process will enhance performance, maximise the effective use of resources, minimise negative impacts on staff, and ensure continuity of support to countries. Analysis and the decisions that follow must be based on clear criteria, and a transparent and participatory process. In the recently-completed first phase of the workforce functional review, the USSA emphasised need for wide participation by staff. The USSA participated as an observer in all seven of the regional reviews, and attended the Regional Support Team Directors meeting where Directors validated findings. The process is widely viewed as a success, and sets a strong foundation for a participatory and strategic next phase which focuses on the Geneva headquarters and Regional Support Teams. Our vision of success for the overall exercise is outlined in greater detail below.

MOBILITY

5. In light of the ongoing workforce functional review, the USSA expressed its strong support to the decision of senior management to postpone the 2011 mobility exercise until there are clear decisions on workforce changes in response to the recommendations. The USSA also received assurances that staff in hardship situations would be considered on a priority basis in ongoing recruitment exercises. We see this decision as being to the benefit of both staff and the Organisation, ensuring that moves will not take place until there is greater clarity about future roles and functions. Looking forward, however, we are concerned about a possible situation in 2012 where there will be more international staff on mobility than posts available. Should there be a reduction in force, affected staff need maximum advanced notice and relevant career support so that they can plan their next steps, together with their families. We are also concerned about a potential large-scale shift in expertise and institutional memory happening in a short time frame, due to the 2011 and 2012 exercises being combined, and including additional changes related to the workforce functional review. Careful planning is needed so that possible negative consequences are foreseen and addressed accordingly. The USSA strongly supports mobility when carried out with strategic purpose. We look forward to continuing our discussions with management on its future, optimising it as a mechanism that advances professional development; places the right people in the right roles to advance the Strategy; and is family-friendly in its implementation.

INTERIM STAFFING MEASURES DURING THE WORKFORCE FUNCTIONAL REVIEW

6. Several interim measures to protect staff members and facilitate analysis in the next phase of the workforce review were announced by senior management in April 2011. The USSA has expressed strong support for the decision to freeze the hiring of external candidates, with the exception of well-documented cases where it is impossible to identify relevant skill sets and experience from within the Organisation. Through our participation on the Mobility Review Committee and the Appointments and Promotions Committee, we have requested that management ensure that each proposed recruitment of an external candidate demonstrates exceptional need, and confirms the high-priority nature of the function in the context of the UNAIDS Strategy.

PROGRESS TOWARDS A SINGLE ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

7. The USSA commends the move to a Single Administrative System. For many years staff have called for “One UNAIDS, one UNAIDS staff contract”, in response to the situation where UNAIDS country offices had two separate systems and conditions of service – UNDP and WHO. We have been informed that over 240 colleagues have received their selection and offer of appointment letters, as required under the procedure to transfer from a UNDP contract to a UNAIDS contract under WHO staff regulations and rules. The USSA is pleased to be a member of the working groups supporting the transition. We have provided views to UNAIDS administration on how we feel the organisation can

best ensure a smooth transition in terms of staff being fully functional vis-à-vis UNAIDS and WHO-based finance and administrative systems, as well as related policies and procedures, by the time their new contracts take effect. The USSA is however concerned about the issue of personnel contracted through UNDP under what is known as Special Service Agreements (SSA) and not formally recognized as staff. Special consideration needs to be given to those employees who in reality have been performing staff functions despite the use of a SSA contract modality, especially those who have been employed in this manner for several years.

MOVING FORWARD: THE USSA VISION OF SUCCESS FOR THE WORKFORCE TRANSFORMATION

8. The USSA maintains a strong partnership with the UNAIDS administration and welcomes the opportunity to be part of a highly-participatory, forward-looking next stage in the workforce functional review. We propose eight key elements of “success” for the process, and we plan to produce an assessment against these eight elements towards the end of 2011.
 - a. **Staff members must be meaningfully engaged in the workforce functional review, contributing knowledge and creative thinking that will strengthen UNAIDS and our ability to deliver on the Strategy.** A survey of UNAIDS staff conducted in April 2011 – following the completion of the first phase of the workforce review – reveals that country-based staff feel most strongly engaged in organisational change at this point in time. The USSA sees this as a positive testament to the quality of engagement in the first phase of the workforce functional review, and this sets the standard for this next phase.
 - b. **The process must be fair and transparent, based on clear, known criteria – developed together with staff – that guide the overall process and apply to all parts of the Organisation.**
 - c. **All staff members must have clarity about their role and the roles of their colleagues (in Geneva, regions and countries) in relation to the UNAIDS Strategy, and their skills and experience must be used to the maximum benefit to UNAIDS and the AIDS response.** The workforce review is an opportunity to ensure that we are optimising each staff member’s contribution to the organisation and the AIDS response. It should also enable the UNAIDS Secretariat to articulate how it is aligning functions within and across teams, and optimise systems for accountability and information sharing in ways that do not become burdensome, bureaucratic processes. The USSA believes that such measures may also produce the “collateral benefit” of improved work-life balance.
 - d. **Measures to protect the current staff members that UNAIDS has invested in must be used to the maximum extent possible.** This includes measures such as reducing non-staff costs, ending the use of retirees, offering voluntary early retirement, freezing the recruitment of people external

to UNAIDS, and abolishing vacant posts that are not essential to delivering on the Strategy.

- e. **Any analysis related to possible outsourcing or “off-shoring” of specific functions must be based on clear and comprehensive criteria.** Such criteria should take into account the full range of contributions to the Organisation’s performance, responsiveness to institutional needs (internal and external), and potential risks associated with shifting the modality for the performance of the function. An analysis based narrowly on costs does not provide a solid foundation for sound decision making.
- f. **UNAIDS must expand investment in the professional development of staff, supporting them into new roles that take the UNAIDS Strategy forward.** In the event that some positions are significantly re-profiled, or proposed for conversion from international professional positions to national officers, the Organisation should endeavour to retain people affected by such actions. This is not only important for the staff member vis-à-vis job security, but it can also be cost-effective for the Organisation in that it can retain people in whom it has invested, and avoid unnecessary costs related to separation.
- g. **Workforce decisions should not have negative implications for diversity in the Organisation.** The USSA believes strongly that a diverse workforce is a strong workforce. We promote the active involvement of people living with HIV in UNAIDS, gender equality across and at all levels of the Organisation, and increased accessibility that enables the equal inclusion of persons with disabilities. We also recognise the need for opportunities for young professionals as part of diversity. While function and “fit for purpose” are the primary consideration of this review, we believe that provisional recommendations should be reviewed for possible implications for diversity in UNAIDS.
- h. **All people performing staff functions for UNAIDS must be in possession of a UNAIDS staff contract.** The UNAIDS workforce functional review, together with the implementation of the Single Administrative System, presents an opportunity to review all non-staff contractual arrangements, notably Special Service Agreements (SSAs) and consultancies, to ensure that all staff work is being carried out under staff conditions of service. The USSA is grateful for the commitment of senior management to ensuring this principle is a reality.

NEXT USSA REPORT TO THE PCB

- 9. The USSA notes that the PCB is due to receive the report on implementation of SIE recommendations related to human resources at its December 2011 meeting. As this item is of critical importance to staff, the USSA would welcome the opportunity to address the Board again at that time.

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