

STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNAIDS STAFF ASSOCIATION

Additional documents for this item: none

Action required at this meeting - the Programme Coordinating Board is invited to:

Take note of the statement by the representative of the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association.

Cost implications for decisions: none

REPORT OF THE UNAIDS SECRETARIAT STAFF ASSOCIATION (USSA) TO THE UNAIDS PROGRAMME COORDINATING BOARD

INTRODUCTION

1. Since June 2004, the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association (USSA) has reported annually to the Programme Coordinating Board. This report highlights key developments since June 2016, including the realignment process, as well as staff priorities identified in the annual USSA staff survey, and will be complemented by an oral presentation to the Board.
2. The USSA Executive Committee continues to have a productive and strong dialogue with UNAIDS senior management. We are fully committed to upholding the interests of staff by working with management to create and maintain an ethical and supportive working environment with socially responsible employment conditions, that promote the development of staff capacity, and fair, transparent, consistent and accountable human resources management processes and grievance procedures which maximize our collective positive impact for the HIV response. We have always been proud to note that, while not always perfect, staff management relations in UNAIDS continues to be held as a model for other organisations.

OVERALL UNAIDS STAFF PERSPECTIVE

3. UNAIDS staff are committed to the goal of ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. UNAIDS' clear mandate and strategy enables us to collectively stay focused on supporting countries to Fast Track their national responses to the epidemic. Staff are concerned, however, about the insufficient level of funding available to the Joint Programme. While staff will continue to seek innovative ways of supporting countries as they pursue the AIDS targets within the SDGs, striving to do more with less, we fear that limitations on funding can jeopardize the capacity of the UNAIDS Joint Programme to deliver on its strategy. With less capacity, there is less opportunity to leverage investments, and missed opportunities to maximize results for people most affected by the epidemic.
4. Each year, the USSA conducts a staff survey on workplace issues and we ask colleagues to indicate their priorities, as well as rate our performance in addressing those priorities. In the most recent survey we had a 59% response rate, which shows high interest and engagement of staff. In this written report we address issues that have been of highest priority to staff since our last statement to the Board, highlighting views expressed by colleagues in the staff survey. We will focus on three topics:
 - UNAIDS realignment exercise
 - Promoting dignity at work
 - Improving Staff Health Insurance services

Realignment exercise

5. The past 12 months have been challenging on many levels for UNAIDS staff. In addition to concerns about budget shortfalls, staff were extremely concerned at the start of 2016 about the potential implications of the realignment exercise. The USSA has represented staff throughout this process and was included as full participants on all related bodies. While the main purpose of the realignment process was to ensure that UNAIDS can deliver on the Fast Track targets, the simultaneous funding crisis added a particularly worrisome aspect to the exercise.
6. The USSA welcomed the efforts made by management to ensure that the processes of the realignment exercise (offers of separation by mutual agreement (SMA), abolishment of posts, creation of new posts in line with the new UNAIDS strategy, and mobility) provided

opportunities and had as little negative impact on staff as possible. Staff appreciated that, exceptionally, national and General Service staff affected by post abolition were given the opportunity to apply for available international posts. The opportunity for staff to apply for SMA on three occasions during the last 18 months was key in minimising the negative impacts on staff and overall reducing the disruptions to the organization in an exercise of this scale.

7. Despite the best efforts of all involved, there have been adverse effects on staff, including the loss of jobs for some. The overall reduction in staffing levels is placing additional pressure on colleagues who are taking on the portfolios of those who have left UNAIDS or have been reassigned following post abolition. Throughout this process the USSA was a source of information and advice to colleagues, and individuals who believed they had a grievance were referred to legal assistance under a group USSA legal insurance policy. In our experience, this was overall a change process with a human face. In this transition phase and to help facilitate smooth implementation of the new structure, the USSA remains in close dialogue with management to raise any emerging concerns.
8. Staff look forward to leaving behind the uncertainties of the last 18 months and giving our undivided attention to delivering on our UNAIDS mandate. Staff appreciate receiving a summary analysis of the decisions related to the realignment and the impact on staff. We feel that this information is important in providing closure to this exercise and ensuring that staff can feel fully confident that the exercise was carried out in a transparent and consultative manner.
9. As well as the direct impact on the number of staff working in UNAIDS, the realignment exercise also included discussion on new “Ways-of-Working” within the Secretariat. Over 100 individuals and groups of staff enthusiastically responded to a call to contribute their ideas on this issue. These innovative suggestions included ideas such as: establishment of practical, time-bound virtual groups with implementable results within Fast Track teams; cultivating expertise through professional online forums to build technical capacity on issues related to Fast Track, strategic information, human rights/gender etc.; and, ensure staff are equipped to deliver through promoting and enforcing the adoption of existing tools to work efficiently across the organization. The USSA sees the proposals as creating opportunity for staff to virtually contribute across the organisation in new ways, reinforcing programmatic coherence, and collaborating in virtual teams independent from their physical location.

Commitment to dignity at work at UNAIDS

10. Wellbeing of staff members is of utmost importance and allows staff to fully contribute to the objectives of the organization. The USSA welcomes the commitment of the administration to ensuring an enabling working environment, including a commitment to zero tolerance for ill-treatment and harassment.
11. There are support services available for UNAIDS staff through WHO, including medical services, counsellors and psychologists. UNAIDS staff also have the possibility to contact WHO Office of the Ombudsman which offers support for staff to resolve interpersonal conflicts in an informal manner. USSA fosters a close working relationship with the Office of the Ombudsman and will continue to refer staff as required. However, to enable staff, including staff in the field, to avail themselves of these services it is necessary to keep staff continuously informed of the services available.
12. UNAIDS staff have indicated, though the annual staff survey, that mental health issues are an important concern for them. The USSA ran pilot dialogue sessions on bullying and harassment which also addressed links to mental health for staff at HQ in July 2016. These

sessions received a very positive response from the majority of participants and the USSA is currently exploring the opportunities to offer additional sessions, including for staff in the field. USSA has been actively voicing staff concerns on the issue of mental health, particularly through the staff federation, FICSA. As a result of this advocacy, USSA will be hosting a FICSA training session on mental health for staff representatives in October this year. We hope that this will be a positive step in addressing this issue in a holistic manner for the benefit of both staff and organisations across the UN system. We are also active members of the UN Mental Health Strategy Working Group which is working to identify key strategic themes with the focus of improving the psychosocial health and wellbeing of UN system staff.

13. We welcome the decision of the administration to offer the UN for All training on diversity and inclusion to all staff. A number of UNAIDS staff members have been trained as trainers and USSA encourages continued support in 2017 with a view to it being rolled out to as many UNAIDS staff as possible. We believe that this training will help strengthen the value of diversity in the UNAIDS workplace.

Improving WHO Staff Health Insurance (SHI) services

14. The concerted efforts in response to staff concerns about SHI continues to be an excellent example how good staff-management relations can work for both staff and the organisation - driving action that strengthens critical systems affecting the wellbeing and security of staff, retirees and their dependants. While there is unfinished business and urgent shortcomings still to address by WHO SHI, we are overall pleased to report back to you on important progress towards attaining the five minimum standards for SHI services, as per our previous reports to the board:
 - a. **Recognition of WHO SHI in all duty stations:** This remains a key concern for UNAIDS field-based staff. While the most recent WHO SHI newsletter shows an increase in the number of recognition agreements between WHO SHI and local healthcare facilities, it is clear that significant effort is still required on this issue as only 15 countries have recognition agreements. The lack of local recognition can prevent SHI participants from availing of timely, quality care, even in urgent situations when there is no time to lose.
 - b. **24/7 multilingual support hotline for health emergencies:** This is an essential service for SHI participants and the USSA was very pleased that WHO SHI contracted a company to provide support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. In this year's USSA Staff Survey we have asked staff for feedback on their experience if they have used the hotline.
 - c. **Claims processing in less than 15 days:** There has been considerable progress on this point. It is noted that the new online claim submission tool may have an additional positive impact, saving the time involved in mailing original documents.
 - d. **Online platform for submission of claims:** This was rolled out to all UNAIDS staff in February 2017. The USSA is very pleased with this development as it aligns WHO SHI with industry standards, saving time and avoiding mailing costs being incurred by the Organization. A question on staff experience with the new tool was included in the USSA 2017 staff survey.
 - e. **Regular information:** In 2014, in response to staff requests for regular communication, WHO SHI initiated a yearly newsletter for participants. The new newsletter contains a lot of useful information. However, we believe that staff would benefit from more frequent communication, including on health promotion and related issues (e.g. encouraging early diagnosis and treatment of health conditions - before they become more difficult to address and more costly to the Staff Health Insurance Fund).

15. While it is clearly an accomplishment to have significantly achieved four out of the five minimum standards, the issue of local recognition of WHO SHI remains the most important concern to staff and the organisation. We are continuing to advocate for urgent action to close the recognition gap, prioritizing the duty stations where the risk to staff, retirees and dependants is the greatest.

PERSPECTIVES AS MEMBERS OF THE UN COMMON SYSTEM

16. UNAIDS staff are affected by developments that are applicable to all staff of the UN common system, notably decisions on conditions of service that are made in the UN General Assembly Fifth Committee or by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). The USSA has worked through the Federation of International Civil Servants Associations (FICSA), of which it is a member, to advocate for conditions of service that enable the UN to attract and retain a diverse and highly qualified workforce, across all duty stations, to deliver on the Organization's challenging and vital mandate. Despite our best efforts, we are disappointed by some of the outcomes of the compensation review for international professionals, particularly those that adversely affected staff serving in hardship duty stations. We are monitoring the implications for staff and will be working with FICSA colleagues to take up concerns with the ICSC and in other fora this year. Recently announced outcomes of a cost-of-living review exercise for several headquarters duty stations, including Geneva, risks a net loss in purchasing power parity for staff. We are deeply concerned by the ICSC's apparent departure from agreed methodology as well as the apparent lack of transparency in their decision making process. We will continue to follow this as an issue with the potential to affect all UNAIDS staff, irrespective of category or duty station, particularly in light of the 85 cost of living surveys scheduled for the next 12 months and the ongoing review by the ICSC of locally-recruited categories of staff.
17. Staff at UNAIDS and across the UN system have welcomed the election of Secretary General, Antonio Guterres. Very soon after taking up his new functions, the Secretary General met with staff, including elected staff representatives. During that meeting, he stated his commitment to do everything he can to ensure that staff-management relations across the agencies and programmes be conducted in a fair and correct manner. He also set out a vision for reform, enhancing results and eliminating bureaucracy in the UN system. We look forward to continuing to work with UNAIDS management to identify ways we can contribute to the Secretary General's vision in the interest of UNAIDS staff and to continually strengthen the effectiveness of our organisation.

GOING FORWARD

18. Moving on from the realignment exercise, staff transitioning into new roles have expressed interest in training and career support that will enable them to maximize their effectiveness and "hit the ground running". At a recent meeting of General Service staff with the Executive Director, colleagues across duty stations and job categories made clear that they were keen to pursue development and career opportunities. The USSA will work with management to identify opportunities to support staff in this regard, strengthening our collective capacity for delivering on the UNAIDS Strategy.
19. The USSA commits to continuing to working with its members and management on the priority areas for staff mentioned above. In this way, we hope to ensure that UNAIDS remains a workplace of choice with highly committed, effective and professional staff, reflecting the diversity of the world we serve, and delivering together to help the world end the AIDS epidemic by 2030.

We thank you for your continued support.

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