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# STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNAIDS SECRETARIAT STAFF ASSOCIATION

AGENDA ITEM 7 UNAIDS/PCB (50)/22.16  
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Eastern and southern Africa



Western and central Africa



Middle East and North Africa



Asia and the Pacific



Eastern Europe and central Asia



Western and central Europe and  
North America



Latin America and the Caribbean

**UNAIDS works across 70  
country offices supported by  
regional support teams,  
liaison offices and the Global  
Centre**

# UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association Statement to PCB

This statement is given by the staff association on behalf of the more than 700 UNAIDS staff members. It covers the issues affecting staff over the past 12 months which affect the ability of staff to deliver on our shared mandate to serve people living with HIV and affected by HIV.

The following key areas of concerns and progress made are covered with recommendations for improvement:

1. Staff health and well-being
2. A safe and respectful working environment
3. Alignment and organization-wide restructuring
4. Staff-management relationship and collaboration

## Key developments affecting staff

UNAIDS has experienced difficult and unprecedented challenges over the last twelve months. Countries continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The world has been rocked by successive conflicts and humanitarian disasters.

UNAIDS staff have responded with dedication, flexibility and solidarity, continuing to deliver towards ending AIDS by 2030.

UNAIDS has also experienced multiple funding shocks amidst a realignment process and changes to ways of working which has caused additional uncertainty and stress for staff during this period.

Due to expected adverse impact on staff members, USSA calls upon management to prioritize reassignment of eligible staff whose posts are abolished and to minimize job losses to the extent possible and to ensure minimum disruption to UNAIDS business continuity in order to deliver on the global AIDS Strategy.

# 1. Staff health and well-being

The simultaneous stress of working during COVID-19; high workloads to deliver Global AIDS Strategy, High Level Meeting; Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework; the need to ensure continuity of HIV programmes during period of global unrest and UNAIDS organization-wide restructuring – has presented unprecedented challenges to the health and well-being of staff members.

A June 2021 staff survey showed 80% of respondents felt that their workloads had increased in the previous 12 months. 59% felt their performance had suffered due to work-related stress or anxiety. USSA observed increased absenteeism and referrals to medical (including mental health) and mediation services more than tripled in 2021 and early 2022 (up from single digit in 2020). Staff reported to pulse surveys and check in sessions that they were “struggling” and “not doing OK”. USSA applauds management for providing support in this area including free mental health support for staff and prioritized ensuring safety of staff in conflict situations and asks for such support to be continued.

USSA continues to call for (1) systems be put in place to manage workloads; (2) proper assessment of staff needs for mental health support and (3) viable and appropriate support mechanisms to prevent work-related anxiety and stress, taking into account local context and differentiated services, among others.

## 2. A safe and respectful working environment

In mid-2020, the culture transformation programme brought together many change processes and provided opportunities for individuals and teams to reflect on and shift team cultures in order to build a more equal, safe, respectful and empowering workplace. We welcome the new policy for preventing harassment that provides clear information to staff on channels for reporting and how to access support.

However, staff survey reveals while 85% of respondents said they know where to report and/or request support only 26% reported harassment and abuse. 58% of respondents did not believe corrective action will be taken and 45% were concerned about retaliation.

USSA looks forward to continue to work with staff and management to monitor occurrences of discrimination, harassment and abuse; reporting; and staff access to support services and remedial actions – providing data in order to improve the situation and ensure that the preventing harassment policy has the impact that is intended. USSA welcomes the appointment of the ethics adviser, now independent from the Executive Office. USSA looks forward to continued collaboration with the ethics adviser, the culture transformation team, the People Management department, the Ombudsman and legal advisors, to help staff access support.

### 3. Alignment and organization-wide restructuring

We will be losing considerable number of skilled and expert staff in this process, at a time when we are expected to deliver more. The restructuring will result in 9% reduction in number of positions at UNAIDS (from 725 to 655 positions).

Staff surveys indicated disappointment that staff inputs on how best to allocate human resources and ideas for cost saving measures (such as work-sharing, flexible working arrangements, reduction in travel, reducing office rental requirements, diversification of contract types, etc) were not sufficiently considered as alternative to cutting staff positions. Staff expressed dissatisfaction regarding the insufficient information and justification of relocation decisions and the abolition of posts. At the same time that we are losing fixed-term staff, USSA has received reports that costs for consultancies (bringing in externals to perform tasks) have escalated significantly between 2021 and 2022.

USSA welcomes the recent communication of 6 June 2022 outlining cost saving measures including (1) freezing new recruitments; (2) restrictions on international travel; (3) reducing office rental costs in Geneva, New York and Washington; and (4) accelerating resource mobilization. The USSA and looks forward to quick realization of efficiencies in order to protect our workforce from further reductions.

## 4. Staff-management relationship and collaboration

As we struggled to cope with global crises and internal change process, the relationship between staff and management has been at times tense while we tried to work together to provide the best work environment for UNAIDS staff members. In this challenging period, USSA observed increasing trend in management releasing new policies without meaningful consultation with staff representatives. USSA is requesting continued consultation on the following two issues, among others

- (i) USSA is requesting revision of the new recruitment policies to ensure equal opportunity for internal staff in open and competitive recruitment process; to limit direct appointments of all positions to exceptional and justifiable cases; and ensure oversight and accountability in all hiring decisions.
- (i) USSA is requesting reconsideration of management decision to relocate the front office USSA administrative support position to Bonn and suggest final decision of location of this mission critical post for USSA to be determined after the USSA constitution amendment, which will define the new USSA representation structure.

USSA is pleased to report that the newly elected USSA Executive Committee (2022-2023) met with EXD and Cabinet on 26 May 2022 to discuss ways to improve consultation, communication and collaboration. We welcome EXD's openness to develop a fruitful and collaborative relationship with USSA as representatives of the Staff. USSA looks forward to this renewed commitment from management and to working together to find innovative solutions to support staff.

# Priority Issues Raised by Staff for 2022-2023

USSA will continue to pursue priority issues raised by staff in collaboration with staff, management, and relevant offices including Ethics, Ombudsman, People Development, Culture Transformation, among others.

## USSA Priorities for 2022-2023

1. **Change implementation** – addressing the impact of change on all staff in all locations and all categories and ensuring there is support for staff health and well-being
2. **Supporting staff health and well-being, including mental health**, has been an ongoing priority that staff members of UNAIDS have continued to call for priority attention. USSA will also continue to explore solutions to ensure timely access to health care for all staff everywhere
3. **Safe and respectful workplace** - we will continue to work with staff and senior management to ensure UNAIDS implements zero tolerance for all forms of harassment and to ensure effective prevention, protection, reporting and justice system.
4. **Career progression & staff skills-building** - USSA will work with People Management Department, in close cooperation with staff and supervisors, to scale up targeted skills-building programmes that will prepare staff for career progressions not only within UNAIDS but also beyond.
5. **USSA Constitutional Amendment** - in response to calls from staff members for a USSA representation structure that is closer to staff needs and in line with the new UNAIDS organizational footprint, USSA will review, explore and propose options for a new representation structure of the USSA
6. **2022 USSA Staff Survey** - the USSA will be rolling out the annual staff survey and update our priorities based on staff responses.



# Conclusion

On behalf of staff, USSA puts forward the following recommendations to management for consideration and prompt action:

1. Place immediate freeze on ALL external recruitment during the alignment exercise
2. Provide priority consideration to internal staff affected by abolition of posts
3. Include all vacant positions in the alignment compendium and fill positions following reassignment process
4. Support staff with career counselling and psychosocial support including reaching out to UNAIDS partners to secure career opportunities for UNAIDS staff
5. Revise new recruitment policy to provide fair and transparent opportunities for all internal staff to compete for all vacant positions and limit direct appointments and non-competitive recruitment processes to truly exceptional cases
6. Finalize mobility policy and provide exceptional extension of mobility incentives to staff who are required to stay beyond their term
7. Explore alternative contract modalities and innovative funding sources to supplement fixed term contracts

The PCB is requested to take note of the Statement of the USSA and to encourage that the best conditions and well-being for staff members are prioritized throughout the restructuring of UNAIDS, with a focus on improved capacity and minimum disruption to UNAIDS Secretariat business continuity in order to deliver on the Global AIDS Strategy.

THANK YOU