

Proposals from the UN staff unions to Secretary-General Guterres

The staff unions wish to bring the following proposals to your attention, to be raised at our meeting on Tuesday 3 January 2017.

Our proposals are based on the following priorities that you have publicly stated as important to your mandate:

- Faster selection of deployment of staff.
- A culture of simplification, decentralization and flexibility.
- Better protection of whistleblowers.
- Gender parity and geographic diversity.
- More effective use of resources.
- A motivated staff.

Mobility

The mobility and staff selection policy entrusts to the Job Network Board the task of carrying out:

- Lateral reassignments – twice a year staff exceeding their post incumbency limits or volunteering to opt in are placed into a pool and reassigned at the same grade to a suitable position taking into account expressed preferences by the staff member and manager.
- Vacancies – twice a year vacant positions are advertised and staff apply. They take a general abilities test, written subject test and interview. The manager ranks the candidates. The JNB makes a recommendation.
- Recruit from roster – as needs arise, staff who are rostered for field positions express interest. The manager ranks candidates. The JNB makes a recommendation.

By far the most complex process is the lateral reassignments. The JNB is asked to find new homes for skill sets, posts and expressed interests that rarely match. In order to maximize matches, staff aren't necessarily matched to the most appropriate posts for them or those in which they expressed interest. This creates uncertainty for staff and an unnecessary workload for the JNB. As an example, in December, a JNB considering P-5s in Polnet took most of an afternoon to finally move only four staff.

2016 was a pilot year and only volunteers took part. From 2017, all staff exceeding post incumbency will be included, leading to an exponential increase in workload and leaving the JNB and OHRM less time to work on the more important vacancy exercise.

Staff unions propose that missions/DFS and departments be responsible for ensuring staff don't go over maximum post incumbency and use their knowledge of the staff and their abilities to match them more effectively and swiftly within their scope. Departments could also be seen in the large sense such as DGACM around the world.

This would leave OHRM and the JNBs to focus on their strengths, which is running the vacancy exercises and ensuring quality and consistency. Freed of the lateral reassignment exercises, they could run four vacancy exercises a year instead of two, minimizing the use of temporary assignments while these posts are filled, providing

more frequent promotion opportunities to staff, and running ad hoc recruit from roster exercises to meet surge requirements for field missions. This would significantly reduce selection times.

Further, abolition of the general abilities test for internal staff would reduce selection times by a further 2-3 weeks.

Obtaining General Assembly clearance to make some vacancies internal only could further reduce times as posting periods and candidate numbers would be reduced. Staff unions can work with OHRM on criteria to propose.

Performance management

Performance reports cannot be used when staff are considered for vacancies for fear of putting external candidates at a disadvantage. This has made performance documents to a large extent meaningless. Their only real value now is in documenting prior to termination.

Staff unions propose first making performance documents more rigorous to prevent abuse and for them to be actively considered when candidates are reviewed for a vacancy.

This would re-establish a link between performance and career development and encourage it to be taken more seriously. This will motivate staff to ever higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency.

Whistleblower protection

The General Assembly has requested an update to the whistleblower policy on protection against retaliation. However, the version being pushed forcefully by administration restricts protection against retaliation to staff who report acts that “if established would be substantially harmful to the interest, operations, or governance of the Organization.”

The current, outgoing, policy provides protection to staff who report the failure of one or more staff members to comply with the staff rules or related documents.

Staff unions believe that the proposed policy will deter staff from reporting anything in case their report does not meet the very high bar being set and therefore doesn't obtain protection from retaliation for having come forward. The alternative, increasingly seen, will be leaks to the press, which will lead to serious reputational issues for the organization.

The administration has stated that they don't wish ordinary workplace disputes to be submitted to the Ethics Office. We agree. However, we also believe that the Ethics Office is capable of filtering out ordinary workplace disputes, and that it should focus providing coverage for staff who come forward in good faith to report all instances of wrongdoing, not just those at the highest levels. A whole policy should not be weakened simply to answer concerns about Ethics Office workload.

Staff unions further believe that those who assist or provide assistance to genuine whistleblowers should also be protected.

The policy being pushed by administration falls short of the General Assembly resolution, which requests “an organizational culture in which staff are not reluctant to speak up and that those who retaliate are held accountable.” It will also jeopardize 15 percent of US funding as UN opponents in Congress will quickly point out the gaps.

Staff unions propose to review the draft on an urgent basis so that it really does provide protection for staff who believe they are doing the right thing in blowing the whistle on wrongdoing.

Global service delivery model

The UN’s headline projects have a track record of being oversold on expectations, delivered in haste and going over budget.

The organization is still not fully aware of what Umoja, which will cost \$1 billion over its lifecycle, will actually be able to deliver. On this basis, staff unions urge a conservative approach to applying GSDM, especially at the start. What looks good on paper may not be so in reality. The literature on GSDM does not adequately cover the daily troubleshooting and workarounds that administrative staff must do to keep operations running. Many issues are sorted out at the local level and a minimum local presence should remain, including in the regional commissions.

Decisions should also not be taken that may have to be reversed at subsequent political and financial cost.

Further, hiring restrictions should be put in place to protect affected GS, NO and P staff.

Staff unions will shortly be conducting a staff satisfaction survey on Umoja.

Gender parity

The organization has a lot to do to ensure that the work of staff is recognized regardless of gender.

Two years ago staff and management discussed positive discrimination proposals and these were rejected by consensus.

But there are other issues to consider.

Staff have brought up the issue of unconscious bias, for which training should be introduced.

A survey by UNOV staff union showed that many women benefiting from flexible working arrangements are unwilling to apply for new posts lest they lose those benefits. So ensuring free availability of FWAs remains important.

The current parental leave policy needs to be reviewed. For some mothers, sharing childcare duties and parental leave with fathers working in the common system would enable them to return to work sooner. The Global Fund has a policy that allows this and could provide a template. Other mothers wish to spend more time with their children before returning to work. To this end UNICEF and WHO both provide two months of special leave with pay in addition to their maternity leave, and this can be an effective retention tool.

The current mobility policy also provides for a more coordinated approach to monitoring this matter and addressing unconscious or conscious bias.

Staff unions are not opposed to applying gender and geographic quotas to external applicants.

A new accountability framework for senior managers

Senior managers of the organization (ASGs and USGs) are usually political appointees, recruited from positions that give them little track record of effective management. Former secretaries-general have shied away from tackling this matter or have only provided superficial solutions. For example, the current accountability framework, the management compact, consists of various tick-box exercises, based on human resource targets and some generalities relating to the mandate of the department or mission.

This does not encourage effective leadership and allows space for senior managers to turn blind eye to favouritism and harassment further down the chain, which in turn demotivates staff as they question the existence of a link between hard work and reward. Each demotivated staff member is a wasted resource and a potential foregone.

Staff unions propose a new accountability framework for senior managers involving:

- a one-week induction training on management skills for all;
- regular 360 degree evaluations of their leadership qualities and management abilities;
- a dedicated cadre of management coaches to provide remedial training;
- a policy of zero-tolerance on harassment by senior managers or knowingly allowing harassment further down the chain; and
- real sanctions for non performers, including demotion and termination, and including at the pension fund.

The UN is most visible at the senior level and our senior managers should earn the respect of member states and staff, not the derision or indifference. Where staff respect their leaders they will take pride in their work and go well beyond their terms of reference.

Temporary staff and non-staff

Temporary staff are required to do the same work as normal staff yet receive only 1.5 days of leave per month.

While the break in service serves to deter use of this contractual modality outside temporary situations, staff unions see no good reason for the reduced benefits and ask that this be corrected. Many specialized agencies retain 2.5 days for temporary staff.

With the need to deploy staff around the world and to new responsibilities, this is also the time to review the use of non-staff, including UNOPS contracts, as these staff cannot be deployed, cannot supervise staff and cannot access Umoja, yet are often ask to do the same tasks as regular staff.

Staff compensation

Recent reviews of compensation for internationally and locally-recruited staff have led to major negative impacts in certain cases:

- Greater weighting of national civil service salaries in GS and NO compensation has led to significant cuts (40% in Bangkok, 5.8% in New York). New staff start on the lower salary scale, working alongside current staff frozen on the original scale. Further bringing GS and NO salaries closer to national civil service salaries, will make it harder to recruit staff of good quality, especially in countries where the UN is asked to carry out work that differentiates itself qualitatively from activities national governments have failed to do.
- The professional compensation review will lead to some significant cuts with regards to education grant (especially in New York or for parents globally at a junior grade) and will lead to regular one percent pay cuts for staff with children and working spouses. Staff unions believe that non-reimbursement of certain items should be reviewed, as well as reimbursement thresholds, and that no staff should have their pay directly cut.

Failure to address these changes will have a direct impact on the organization's ability to recruit the best and the brightest and be able to act effectively and efficiently. Staff unions look forward to your advocacy on this at the spring session of ICSC.

Staff safety

The UN flag is increasingly a target rather than a shield. Staff are asked to work in evermore dangerous locations.

Safety and security are too often placed after operational factors and financial revenue considerations, and the number of staff and contractors killed shows this.

Staff unions believe the following is key:

- Improve the protection provided to our field colleagues, wherever they operate, so there is no trade-off between the humanitarian and peacekeeping business model and staff safety.
- Grant protected legal status to UN field workers and work out how those in governments and elsewhere can be held accountable for attacks on our staff.
- Clarify the role and obligations of UN peacekeepers in providing protection to our staff and to all humanitarian workers, many of whom work in partnership with us to carry out our mandates.

- Provide the same duty of care to national as to international staff. They do the same work and face the same danger as do their families who live in the conflict zone. Our organization therefore owes them and their families the same protection.

The better the UN can protect its staff the more respect it will gain, the better it will be able to protect others, and the more confidence it will generate in its own staff to deploy to more difficult and dangerous locations.

Ensuring effective dialogue between staff and management

The General Assembly has consistently recognized the importance of meaningful staff-management consultations. Unions represent staff and managers and are aware of the positive and negative impacts of various policy proposals. Unions are also well placed to make constructive suggestions, and there is a prior history of effective engagement in this regard.

Unfortunately, staff unions noticed during 2016:

- issues being forced through SMC with staff representatives left in no doubt that their input was not welcome; and
- issues affecting staff welfare being submitted straight to the General Assembly without passing through the SMC.

This led staff unions to find other means to advocate for staff interests, in many cases successfully, including directly to the General Assembly.

Staff unions have hope that the SMC can be used once again for meaningful consultation on all issues affecting staff welfare.

Staff unions also believe that they should be able to operate free of unwarranted interference by certain local administrative offices.