



# USSA PCB Statement

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- STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNAIDS SECRETARIAT STAFF ASSOCIATION (USSA)
- AGENDA ITEM 6 UNAIDS/PCB (54)/24.13
- 54 PCB MEETING, 26 JUNE 2024

# Overview

USSA Statement draws on data from:

- Global Staff Survey;
- The USSA mid-year check-in questionnaire and
- Direct communication with staff through various forms.

The USSA will also provide you with an update on the implementation of recommendations that USSA made last year.



# Background of USSA

Since 2005, USSA became an independent staff association for UNAIDS with constitution setting out our mandate to:

1. Ensure that the conditions of employment of all staff of the UNAIDS Secretariat conform to labor standards and Staff Rules and Regulations;
  2. Safeguard the rights and interests of all members of the UNAIDS Secretariat staff and to promote their welfare; and
  3. Cooperate in achieving the objectives of UNAIDS.
- While the USSA looks out for all 738 UNAIDS staff, there are 363 dues paying members.



# USSA Recommendation 1

- Prioritize retention of staff whose positions have been abolished and who meet eligibility criteria for reassignment
- Whilst USSA appreciates efforts made to this end by the Organization, USSA is disappointed to see that external recruitment continues.
- Transparency in recruitment decisions, within the framework of Alignment or beyond it, continues to be a major concern to staff.

# USSA Recommendation 2

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Revise staff recruitment policies to ensure a fair, transparent, competitive process for all positions and where there are exceptions, rationale and justification must be robustly documented and shared with all staff.

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USSA notes the slight improvements reported by the 2022 Global Staff Survey but remains concerned by the fact that nearly two-thirds of staff had reservations regarding how decisions are made within the organization, whether it has handled Alignment effectively, the career support it offers to high performers, and whether SLT truly understands the views and opinions of staff.

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The USSA is concerned by some of the proposed changes to our Recruitment Policies (for fixed-term and short-term positions), which reduce oversight, transparency, and fairness



# USSA Recommendation 3

- Urgently scale up across all duty stations support mechanisms for staff to navigate and cope with change (career and up-skilling support as well as counselling and mental health support), including prioritize development of strategies for preventing stress and burn out at the workplace and USSA.
- The Secretariat has one Staff Counsellor who is based in Geneva to support all staff across duty stations. We recommend additional staffing in this office to avoid overloading and possible burn out of the Staff Counsellor.



# USSA Recommendation 4

Secure additional resources to cover the anticipated human resources gap to safeguard core functions of the Secretariat.

The alignment exercise, among other factors, resulted in the loss of 131 staff during the year 2022. Our financial predicament continues, and many positions remain vacant. Units are expected to deliver the same outputs with resources that are markedly reduced. At the same time, new ways of working are being implemented at a rapid rate, yet workload and mental health are the top priority identified by staff for USSA to focus on. Staff are working beyond 8-hour days and through the weekends to get things done. This is not viable in the long run. Doing “more with less” is fine rhetoric and probably workable as a stopgap measure, but it is not a solution.

Should the funding deficit continue, or even worsen, USSA calls on management to structure the scope of UNAIDS work to match our current staffing level, and rapidly scale up staff access to support measures without delay, based on the needs expressed by staff.

USSA also asks management to communicate frequently with staff to update on resource mobilization and resource utilization to facilitate workplan adjustments, resource allocation reviews and securing of essential human resources to deliver results.

# Relationship between management and USSA

- USSA relationship with management has improved and we hope it continues to improve.
- USSA have monthly meetings with the Directors of Management and Change Management. We use this space to present issues from staff and management provides feedback. USSA moderates these meetings.
- USSA also met the Executive Director once and she has promised quarterly meetings since the last PCB and we appreciate her commitment to USSA.
- USSA participates in numerous oversight and human resources related groups at UNAIDS and these include Recruitment Review Board, Duty of Care Working Group, Staff Health Insurance Task Force, observer in Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meetings.





# Challenges faced and ways forward

- the last couple of years have been a very difficult period for staff and inevitably, the Staff Association. Our precarious financial situation impacts every aspect of our work, including staff retention and programme delivery, and has forced staff to cope and adapt under conditions of great uncertainty and hardship, whilst continuing to deliver on our commitment to end AIDS by 2030.
- Since the last PCB, USSA managed to secure 14 seats out of 15 seats on the staff committee, but we lost 1 volunteer due to departure from the organization. Following the latest round of elections, the Executive Committee is at near full complement with 14 members once again.
- USSA has been reassigned the administrative support in the past six months who is based in Bonn rather than Geneva. The decision to relocate may be justified on financial grounds, but it is by every other measure detrimental to the greater welfare and broader interests of UNAIDS Secretariat staff since it deprives the Staff Association of 24/7 on-the-ground presence in the Global Centre.
- The recently concluded 2024 elections to the Executive Committee showed that participation was up nearly 5% compared with 2023. This is welcome news, although the question remains as to why so few candidates come forward from the Global Centre. We hope senior management will fully support, facilitate and protect staff who take on this duty and provide them with adequate resources to function effectively.

# Priority areas for the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association

- During the mid-year check-in with staff, they told USSA to prioritize on six key areas and these include:
  1. Staff wellbeing, including mental health and workload issues.
  2. Harassment and abuse of authority.
  3. (Re)alignment and mobility.
  4. Career advancement.
  5. Fairness and transparency in policy implementation.

# Proposed Recommendations

The USSA presents below a summary of outstanding issues that staff would like the Senior Management to address:

1. A clear, comprehensive report on the conclusion of Realignment and the People Strategy. What is the human resources plan? What shape will mobility take in the new UNAIDS?
2. Biannual update on UNAIDS resource mobilization efforts.
3. Implementation of support measures for staff to cope with high workload.
4. Staff Health Insurance coverage that is accessible, reasonable, and available all the time to staff globally.
5. Ensuring a supportive and enabling environment for USSA to operate within, adequately resourced.

# Vote of thanks

- PCB members, observers, colleagues, and friends, on behalf of USSA, and indeed on behalf of all UNAIDS staff, I wish to convey our deepest appreciation to you, for believing in us; for consistently acknowledging our work, and for emphasizing the importance of prioritizing staff well-being. We count on your continued support to fully fund the Joint Programme – our UBRAF – as we look forward to the day when the AIDS response is fully resourced, and we can complete our work to end inequalities and to end AIDS.
- So, as we slowly emerge from our “winter of discontent”, USSA is committed to becoming a credible, trusted, and respected institution once more. Credible and trusted by the staff it serves, and credible and respected by UNAIDS management.



*Thank you.*