

**STATEMENT BY THE
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNAIDS
SECRETARIAT 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 (USSA)

Cost implications for the implementation of the decisions: none

Introduction

1. The USSA's mission is:
 - to advocate for fair and supportive employment conditions that enable staff to make the most positive contribution to the HIV response;
 - to ensure that conditions of employment conform to commonly accepted standards established by the ILO and WHO Staff Rules and Regulations;
 - to safeguard the rights and interests of members of staff;
 - and to promote staff welfare and wellbeing so that all of us, and ultimately the organization, function at peak levels in contributing to the global HIV response.
2. The USSA represents the rights and interests of nearly 700 staff around the world and as of April 2020, over 70% were dues-paying members.
3. The USSA is governed by a Constitution, which has been ratified by all dues paying members, and has an elected Executive Committee. The Executive Committee strives to maintain an open and constructive dialogue with the Senior Management Team on key issues affecting staff. The USSA's discussions with Management are guided by principles laid out in the *Agreement on Cooperation* between the UNAIDS administration and the USSA which was formalized and signed with Management in 2010. This agreement commits Senior Management and the USSA to mutually engage in a timely and constructive manner on all issues affecting staff; to communicate openly, honestly and regularly; and to apply good faith in resolving issues.
4. As per the USSA Constitution – the Staff Association Executive Committee has 15 members elected by all dues paying members through an annual election process—seven who are Geneva based, and eight from the field.
5. Since June 2004, the USSA has reported annually to the Programme Coordinating Board. This report highlights key developments since the USSA's last report to the PCB in June 2019, as well as priorities that staff identified in the latest annual USSA staff survey. An oral statement to the Board will complement this report.

Relationships between the USSA and Management

6. The USSA Executive Committee has continued a productive dialogue with UNAIDS senior management since the Staff Association's last report to the PCB. We take this opportunity to thank Executive Director Winnie Byanyima, Deputy Executive Director Shannon Hader, Deputy Executive Director ai Tim Martineau, and Director of Human Resources Management Alison Holmes for their collaboration. We look forward to continuing and improving our constructive engagement with them and their teams.
7. During our most recent meeting with the Executive Director, we appreciated her statements regarding the importance of reviewing mobility to ensure that the organization gets the right people in the right positions, while also enhancing career advancement opportunities and addressing equity.
8. We also acknowledge with appreciation her stated intention to enhance her engagement with the USSA through more frequent conversations.
9. In our interactions with the Executive Director and other senior managers in recent months, the USSA has underscored the importance of ensuring a stable work

environment with minimum negative impact on staff as we finalize the transition towards a new UNAIDS Strategy and a strengthened Joint Programme.

10. During the coming transition period, the Staff Association has prioritized opportunities to work with UNAIDS management to strengthen a supportive working environment that:
 - Ensures fair and equal employment conditions;
 - Guarantees transparent, consistent and accountable human resource management processes;
 - Actively prevents all forms of incivility, harassment, sexual harassment or abuse of authority, and takes swift action when such events occur; and
 - Promotes the development of staff capacities that can maximise the organisation's positive impact on the global AIDS response.

The Staff Survey

11. This section reviews key findings from the annual staff survey and highlights some significant staff personal, professional, organizational and HIV response concerns.
12. The survey conducted in April 2020 had a 61% response rate, which was only slightly lower than the 2019 rate of 64%. Given the disruptions created by COVID-19 on staff lives and working modalities, this response rate exceeded expectations.
13. Survey respondents this year were largely representative of UNAIDS Secretariat staff globally. Roughly 30% of responses came from Geneva-based staff, and the rest from country, regional and liaison offices. More women than men responded. The highest response rates came from the regions of Eastern Europe and Central Asia with a 74% response, Eastern and Southern Africa with 70%, and Asia Pacific with 66% of their staff responding.

UNAIDS and the Management Response to COVID-19 Impact on Staff

14. The COVID-19 pandemic is presenting the organization with unprecedented challenges at a time of change and transition. In recognition of pandemic-related issues for staff, the USSA staff survey included a section to gauge staff perceptions on the organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The vast majority of staff expressed satisfaction with management's efforts to ensure the safety of staff and their dependents, and in exercising the organization's duty of care. The survey found that 90% of staff were satisfied or very satisfied with the timeliness and substance of management's communications and actions related to the pandemic.
15. Management has ensured business continuity while allowing for flexible working arrangements so that staff could care for their own health and safety and that of their families. Comments submitted by survey respondents gave credit for these good results to HQ as well as to the Regional Support Teams and Country Offices, which quickly mobilized to respond to the rapidly escalating emergency.
16. Nearly all respondents who answered questions about COVID-19 felt they had the required knowledge to use the tools UNAIDS provided for working remotely, and respondents said that UNAIDS' teleworking policy has supported them in dealing with their personal and family situations in the context of this unprecedented global crisis.
17. Eighty per cent of survey respondents reported that the equipment and hardware that was provided by UNAIDS allowed them to work remotely and that the IT infrastructure in

their duty stations was largely sufficient for remote work; 84% felt that administrative processes in UNAIDS such as HR, procurement, travel, and payments continued remotely without undue disruption; and 78% felt that core HIV response business has been continuing remotely without significant disruption.

18. There remain several challenges for the organization and staff, including a phased return to offices in countries where the COVID-19's epidemic peak has passed. USSA appreciates management's quick action to address staff safety as the extent and severity of the pandemic became known, and we appreciate management's continuing commitment to ensuring staff wellbeing through, for example continuing to allow vulnerable staff or staff with vulnerable dependents to continue to work remotely.
19. We look forward to working with Management to take stock of the lessons from the pandemic response, including the move to alternative working and convening modalities and how more extensive use of such modalities promote staff wellbeing at the same time as the organization looks for cost-savings.
20. We draw attention to the issues around duty of care that the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted, and will work with management to continue to advocate for better access to medical evacuation services for both international and national staff with severe medical conditions, whether resulting from COVID-19 or other life-threatening medical conditions.

Staff Wellbeing

21. As UNAIDS increasingly focuses on the importance of Universal Health Coverage, we must also ensure that we have our own house in order. While progress is being made, Staff Health Insurance (SHI) issues remain high on the minds of staff, retirees, and their dependents. It was a priority issue for 23% of survey respondents—the second most common priority mentioned by staff. Specifically, staff continue to be concerned about access to quality care, reimbursement times, and support for staff and their families living with chronic illnesses.
22. In the context of COVID-19:
 - The pandemic spotlighted the challenges staff have in accessing health services that are essential in the organization's overall duty care to staff, their families, and retirees;
 - The pandemic has equally highlighted duty of care as a significant priority for staff, retirees and their dependents, especially those living with chronic illnesses. These staff, retirees and their dependents are more vulnerable to COVID-19, but they may also have diminished access to overall health care during the response to the pandemic and periods of social distancing; and
 - COVID-19 may also leave the organization with more staff, retirees and dependents facing chronic illnesses in the wake of COVID-19 infection and recovery.
23. COVID-19 has made clear the urgent need to ensure that staff have access to facilities in their duty stations that recognize SHI. Fewer than half of survey respondents were aware of whether there are SHI-recognized facilities in their duty station, and even in locations where the SHI has recognized service providers, 13% of staff have had difficulties accessing care at these facilities. There are currently 392 existing agreements with health care providers worldwide, with 50% of these located in just seven countries. A number of duty stations with large staff numbers, such as Bangkok, have no recognized agreement in place.

24. SHI recognition is especially critical during times of crisis. Survey respondents reported 27 medical emergencies during the past 12-month period where treatment was delayed or prevented due to lack of SHI recognition (compared to 27 in 2018 and 36 in 2017).
25. The survey also found that 26% of respondents are themselves, or have a recognized dependent, living with a chronic illness and of those who are, 56% reported that up-front, out-of-pocket expenses for treatment, diagnostics or care affected their ability to access or stay on necessary treatment.
26. Staff comments associated with the survey call for health and wellbeing to be framed within the organization's overall duty of care for staff, including both physical and mental health.
27. USSA welcomes the recent addition of the Staff Counsellor for Wellbeing and Mental Health, and we are hopeful that having this dedicated staff member will ameliorate some of the issues that staff are communicating to us through the survey and directly.

Transparency and Fairness

28. The Management Action Plan specifies the need to review and redesign the staff mobility policy, the organization's recruitment and workforce planning processes, and its career development modalities.
29. At the June 2019 PCB, USSA stressed that the organization's recruitment, promotion and mobility policies and practices are perceived by staff as lacking transparency and enabling favoritism.
30. USSA has called for any review or revision of fundamental human resources processes to be transparent and fully consultative, including staff representation in the review and development processes.
31. Over the past year, several key activities have taken place, including:
 - The 2019-2020 mobility process;
 - A mobility review; and
 - A revised UCD assessment and selection process
32. Management has engaged USSA in these processes, and the staff association has been pleased to provide input on a number of issues of concern to staff in support of management action. For example:
 - USSA presented a detailed public position on whether mobility should proceed this year and under what conditions which reflected staff thinking on how mobility could be improved or revised;
 - We made interventions on the importance of strengthening the code of conduct for MRC members as well as the criteria for mobility waivers, and we feel that this has contributed towards the organization taking a more consistent—though still imperfect—approach to mobility waivers; and
 - We provided individual staff members with legal advice on the issue of medical waivers (as well as a number of other issues), thus supporting individuals to address their concerns over mobility and other matters.

33. USSA's statement to the Mobility Review process in September 2019 reiterated our position that:
- Mobility can strengthen UNAIDS if implemented appropriately;
 - Mobility in its current form is not working;
 - Transparency and fairness must be ensured in the implementation of the mobility policy;
 - The objectives of mobility must include staff career development consideration;
 - UNAIDS should actively promote inter-agency mobility; and
 - Staff and their families / dependents should be better supported by the organisation in the context of mobility.
34. USSA will continue to support Management to prioritize ensuring that all staffing and other decisions are taken fairly, equitably, honestly and transparently. Our position is clear that increasing transparency and the consistent application of rules is critical, not only in helping ensure accountability, but to help build trust amongst staff that these processes are fair.
35. USSA will continue to address actual or perceived breaches of staff rules and regulations or possible breaches of personal and confidential information, such as medical assessments included in mobility waiver applications with Management directly.
36. We have taken note of staff perceptions expressed in the annual survey and directly to the USSA that the process of mobility lacks fairness and transparency. We remain clear that there should be no departure from process and rules regarding staffing, mobility or waiver of mobility, or other staffing decisions.
37. Among staff who were participating in the recent mobility:
- 83% of agreed with the statement "I was aware of the rotational status of my post" (down from 88% in 2019);
 - 47% disagreed with the statement "the list of posts matched my skills and experience" (44% in 2019); and
 - 82% of respondents from HQ disagreed with the statement "the list of posts matched my skills and experience"
38. Perceptions expressed in the staff survey open-ended comments indicate that headquarters staff with specialized functions feel that they cannot find suitable positions within the mobility compendium, compared to field-based international professional staff, who are more likely to be among several dozen staff with similar job descriptions (e.g. UCDs and SI Advisers).
39. Staff also expressed a range of opinions in the 2020 staff survey on the UCD assessment and selection processes, with 60% of respondents agreeing with the statement that the processes will help make UNAIDS more fit for purpose and will place the best qualified staff in UCD posts (only 14% disagreed).
40. USSA notes with appreciation that the UCD selection and assessment processes have been improved.
41. However, when asked whether the UCD assessment and selection process in 2019/2020 was implemented in a transparent and fair manner, only 26% of staff survey respondents agreed, while 22% disagreed, and 52% said they did not know (data analysis is ongoing). Trust in the implementation of the process appears low.

Incivility, Discrimination, Abuse of Authority, Harassment and Other Misconduct

42. USSA welcomes the efforts to revise the UNAIDS policy on addressing harassment, including sexual harassment, discrimination and abuse of authority. We thank the Human Resources Department for giving the Staff Association sufficient time to provide comments on the draft policy. While there is still some room for improvement in the draft, we note that the Secretariat is taking important steps towards zero harassment by giving due attention to both prevention and accountability.
43. USSA recognizes the efforts of management in addressing sexual harassment over the past year. There were three incidents of sexual harassment reported through the staff survey, compared to ten in 2019. While this indicates an improvement, USSA continues to call for zero tolerance on all forms of harassment, including sexual harassment, in the workplace.
44. USSA also remains concerned that discrimination persists at UNAIDS. We note with particular concern that the staff survey shows three cases of perceived discrimination based on a worker's actual or assumed HIV status. We appreciate Management's engagements with UN Plus and the Staff Association while also investing in programmes that sensitize staff on the core issues that UNAIDS champions. There is no room for such workplace discrimination anywhere, but especially in the UN's Joint Programme on HIV.
45. Advancing gender equality is integral in reaching zero discrimination. This year's survey shows that there has been progress in addressing discrimination related to gender and gender identity. USSA supports the full implementation of the Gender Action Plan to 2023, along with the Secretariat's plan to implement a gender-action learning programme. The Staff Association will continue to work with Management and the Gender Action Plan Challenge Group towards achieving a gender-equal and equitable workplace.
46. Forty-three per cent of survey respondents indicated that they have experienced at least one incident of incivility in the workplace which left them feeling offended, humiliated or intimidated. USSA repeats its call for management to take a zero tolerance approach to incivility, and to strengthen the engagement of Dignity at Work Advisers, the Gender Action Plan Challenge Group, UN Plus, Young UN, UN Globe, and the Diversity Task Force as they all contribute to ensuring that UNAIDS is a safe environment for all staff.
47. USSA notes the likely positive contribution of the new UCD orientation programme towards addressing abuse of authority. It is worth noting, however, that survey results show that there has been no significant change in the number of staff witnessing or experiencing incidents of abuse of authority. We urge management to provide refresher courses for existing UCDs, RST Directors and other managers to remind them of their responsibilities in ensuring a workplace free of harassment, bullying, abuse of authority and misconduct.
48. USSA notes the EXD's organizational culture transformation plans, including her focus on challenging power structures through feminist thinking and the rollout of specific initiatives such as the Gender at Work consultancy. USSA welcomes these changes and requests regular and wider consultation with staff on the objectives and scope of this work, as well as better communication on what these initiatives mean for the organization and staff.

Staff Workloads – Burnout and Stress

49. The 2020 Staff Survey shows that 73% of respondents felt that their workloads had increased over the previous 12 months, compared to 50% saying this in the 2019 survey, and 46% of respondents felt that their performance suffered due to work-related stress or anxiety in the last 12 months. Nearly three quarters (72%) of respondents reported having performed extra hours in response to internal requests in the past year. While 70% of these staff members reported discussing the issues with their supervisor, half felt it hadn't led to positive change.
50. USSA notes with great concern the negative impacts that increasing workloads and stress have had on staff well-being, productivity, and overall organizational performance, and we call on Management to continue to seek ways to strengthen staff support services and to better prioritise work through improved planning and workload distribution.
51. At the same time, 82% of survey respondents reported that they are happy to go to work. This positively reflects staff commitment to UNAIDS and its mission, and reinforces the importance of moving quickly to address workload and work-related stress and anxiety issues.

Other Human Resource Related Issues: Staff Support, Performance Management, Career Advancement, Recruitment and Learning

52. USSA notes that both staff and supervisors expressed general satisfaction with the existing Performance Management system and references the MAP's call on Management to be inclusive and consultative in any dialogue towards review of the existing system. We note with concern, however, that there has been no change in the number of staff stating through the staff survey that they were appraised incorrectly and in a hurtful way by their supervisors.
53. USSA urges Management to continue exploring opportunities for staff to undertake appropriate learning and training programmes, and for staff to be allowed adequate time within work schedules for such initiatives. USSA believes this is an important element in addressing staff concerns about lack of opportunities for career progression and growth.
54. USSA notes Management's efforts to date, as well as the importance of accelerating efforts to ensure compliance with existing rules and provisions that relate to:
- Recruitment, including compliance with UNAIDS recruitment policies stipulating internal advertisement of international professional vacancies first before advertising externally; and
 - Apply the existing regulations and rules governing re-classification, including lifting the freeze on all reclassifications. Legal advice to the Staff Association makes clear that, under ILOAT case law, the freeze can be challenged by a staff member whose request for reclassification was suspended or denied due to the ongoing freeze with likely success.

USSA Reflections on Issues Raised in Reports Presented to the 46th PCB

55. The USSA has worked closely with HRM and will continue to strongly advocate around HR issues in the coming year. We look forward to working with Management to ensure

staff involvement in all discussions and decisions on HR issues and will continue to advocate for more information to be shared by HRM on current staffing and future plans.

56. USSA notes the increase in staffing (16 people) reported in the HR submission to the PCB which brings total staffing to 696 people. We seek clarification on whether this increase reflects the filling of long-standing vacancies, or if new positions have been created. We note with concern the discussion in paragraph 7 of the document on downgrading of posts and note that the downgrading of vacant posts is contradictory with the thinking on classification. All positions should be determined according to the weight of skills and experience needed for a particular post to be filled as per the WHO definition of position classification.
57. USSA notes that the HR report discusses the mobility review and states in paragraph 12 that "...a key finding has been that UNAIDS professional staff largely support mobility as an effective business practice for the organization, but also support greater transparency and consistency in the way that decisions are made." This is largely inconsistent with the USSA 2020 staff survey results which show that a minority of staff agreed with positive statements on mobility while the majority of staff continue to perceive that mobility is not placing the best people in positions or improving the performance of the organization or its units.
58. USSA notes the positive work towards simplifying internal conflict resolution processes and to promote the Internal Justice System. However, we note that the MAP and HR report timelines for this process appear to be inconsistent.
59. Section II of the HR report notes that "800 participants" were trained in a variety of topics. USSA acknowledges the progress in providing opportunities for staff learning but notes that staff consistently raise concerns about the limited range of training opportunities that contribute to personal and professional growth, as opposed to training on administrative or bureaucratic functions. All the staff survey results of recent years consistently raise staff concerns on the lack of career development opportunities - something which a well-conceived training programme could address.
60. USSA notes the mention (paragraph 52) of completion of two staff support webinars and further notes that this was an excellent collaborative effort by HRM, USSA and other stakeholders. USSA sees this as a good example of cooperation that deserves note and due credit to all organizing parties.
61. The Staff Association also takes note of the mention in paragraph 68 of the HR Report of piloting the decentralization of some functions and ongoing discussions with the WHO Global Service Centre in Malaysia to explore the possibility of off-shoring high-volume transactional services, such as the administration of certain benefits and entitlements. We request that the USSA be involved in ongoing discussions on both matters in order to represent staff interests.
62. We note the recommendation in the reports on oversight and audit to "...push forward the implementation of the MAP especially on the areas where there is less progress, to address, among others, the staff priority issues and concerns identified in staff surveys, with the end view of achieving the vision of a healthy, equitable and enabling workplace for all UNAIDS staff". The Staff Association welcomes this recommendation.
63. USSA welcomes Management's commitment to strengthening internal communication and the expansion of opportunities for staff to voice their views, needs and concerns and note the centrality of inclusion, transparency, openness and engagement as concepts

underpinning the MAP. This will be more important than ever as the organization embarks on transition towards a new Strategy.

64. USSA welcomes the completion of several recommendations made in the MAP including the recruitment of the Staff Counsellor for Wellbeing and Mental Health, the publication of Dispute Resolution and Corrective Administrative Actions, and the completion of the new internship policy.
65. USSA echoes the call made in the MAP progress report to strengthen the PCB's monitoring and evaluation role, especially in relation to zero tolerance against harassment and abuse, but also in helping to improve the implementation of PCB recommendations and internal reforms.
66. The Staff Association thanks the Executive Director for ensuring broad staff engagement in the development of the next UNAIDS Strategy alongside external partners, stakeholders, communities, and friends of the organization. It is critical that staff have input into what will certainly impact staffing and personnel issues. We commend the Executive Director for engaging in a series of townhall conversations, and for making time to engage with staff region by region, department by department and we encourage this direct communication and engagement to become a regular part of the organisation's culture.
67. We also note the Executive Director's engagement with not only the USSA, but with UN Plus, The Dignity at Work Advisers, the Gender Action Plan Challenge Group, the Diversity Task Force, Young UN, and other mechanisms. We note that the MAP review states that an internal working group on the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy will be established, but request management to consider consolidation of mechanisms with duplicative mandates to reduce the pressure placed on staff participating in multiple and often overlapping processes with overlapping mandates
68. The MAP report makes reference to *"...a new Field Support Team ... being established at Headquarters under the Deputy Executive Director, Programme, as a one-stop shop for support and problem-solving, and for enhancing our coordination, focus and impact."* USSA will seek clarification from Management on how this "one-stop shop" will support and augment the existing organizational architecture (e.g. the Regional Support Teams) and contribute to streamlining and reducing staff workload.
69. USSA welcomes the progress towards the establishment of a consultative task force to advise on and support the elaboration of a much needed UNAIDS Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, which would be aligned with the overall UN system-wide strategy. USSA appreciates being included in the discussions to date.
70. USSA also welcomes HRM's strengthening of its policy and legal capacities; the release of anonymized summaries of disciplinary actions taken by Management; and release of the analysis of appeals and requests for administrative review to promote transparency and accountability.

USSA Priorities for the coming year

71. USSA recognizes that the finalization and operationalization of the new strategy will dominate the conversation and thinking of staff and the organization over the coming year, and we call for clear and regular communication from Management on the new strategy development progress, and related Joint Programme reform and restructuring developments as to how these developments will impact staff.

72. We note that, while there has been considerable discussion around elements of the process, there is a sense expressed through staff comments appended to the staff survey that there are also many things happening that are not being communicated with clarity and regularity to staff.
73. USSA is regularly approached by staff seeking clarity on how the new strategy and resultant restructuring will affect the organisation's mandate and what the impact on the staffing footprint and respective workload will be. We request regular transparent and unfiltered communication on this subject to be the norm in order to allay the escalating staff anxiety and corridor talk about restructuring that has already begun.
74. In addition to the many issues that will fall out of the strategy and alignment processes, USSA will continue to focus on advocating for staff on their critical concerns: staff wellness and related SHI issues especially issues brought to light by the COVID-19 pandemic; fairness and transparency; the review and reform of the recruitment policy and mobility system; the reclassification freeze; zero tolerance around harassment, bullying, discrimination, sexual harassment and other forms of abuse; the performance management system; remote working modalities; and professional and career development opportunities.

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