

STAFF UNION BULLETIN
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26 November 2007

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
SECOND SESSION

30 October 2007

Record of decisions

The President of the Staff Union Committee opened the second session of the Annual General Meeting at 13.30 p.m., and welcomed the participants.

1. Election of the Chairperson

The President of the Staff Union Committee explained that, in the absence of the Chairperson of the first session of the Annual General Meeting who was ill, it was necessary to elect a Chairperson for the second session.

The name of Mr. Ibrahim Mayaki was proposed by the General Meeting and seconded.

Mr. Mayaki was elected as Chairperson of the General Meeting and thanked his colleagues for the honour bestowed on him.

2. Adoption of the agenda (doc. SU/AGM/2007/2/D.1)

The Chairperson asked whether there were any proposals regarding the agenda. A participant requested the addition of an item concerning the Staff Health Insurance Fund (SHIF).

The agenda was adopted with the additional item.

3. Report of the Staff Union Committee (doc. SU/AGM/2007/2/D.2)

Presenting the annual report for 2006-07, the President of the Staff Union Committee said that, in the interests of dialogue and transparency, the Committee had made every effort during the past year to maintain open relations with the administration. She then proceeded to comment on the report point by point.

3.1 Implementation of the Programme and Strategy

Since one of the objectives of the Programme was to strengthen the role of the Staff Union, the Committee's work had been carried out in the ILO's three official languages. The Staff Union had stepped up its activities at the international level, for example in the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions of the United Nations System (CCISUA), the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), etc.

The Staff Union's participation in these bodies was especially important if they were to present a united front and adopt a common approach to the pending issues, and notably the question of the United Nations reform process.

A draft resolution aimed at tackling the problems that might arise in this area was proposed by a member of the Staff Union Committee. During the discussion, it was suggested that the first point in the resolution be phrased more forcefully. The Committee was asked to keep the staff informed of developments.

The resolution was adopted.

Point 3.1 of the Committee's report was adopted.

3.2 Improve dialogue at the ILO: Information, consultation and negotiation

The President described the progress made in this area, especially as regards contacts with the directors, the administration, CABINET and the Director-General.

Point 3.2 of the Committee's report was adopted.

3.3 Increase and guaranteeing transparency in recruitment and selection procedures

The President referred to the renegotiation of the collective agreement and the drafting of the terms of reference. The working group on the technical aspect of recruitment and selection was actively discussing means of increasing transparency and participation in the process.

A participant noted that there was agreement on the principles to be embodied in the collective agreement but that the appendixes would have to be carefully negotiated.

Point 3.3 of the Committee's report was adopted.

3.4 Equality of treatment of all officials without discrimination

The President said that the Staff Union Committee was actively engaged in the promotion of equal treatment of men and women.

A participant mentioned the discrimination that existed among officials on the basis of their employment status.

Another participant requested that, in the French text, the word “améliorer” be replaced by the words “mise en œuvre” in connection with the policy of integrating handicapped persons, under “Expected results”.

Point 3.4 of the Committee’s report was adopted.

3.5 Campaign against abuse and inappropriate use of contracts

The President described the action taken against precarious employment (SSA contracts).

It was proposed that the question of discrimination in relation to HIV/AIDS be raised. Mention was also made of the efforts being made to harmonize the contractual policy of the various agencies of the United Nations system. Officials with technical cooperation (TC) contracts were reminded that they could apply as external candidates for vacant posts normally reserved for internal candidates.

Point 3.5 of the Committee’s report was adopted.

3.6 Improve working conditions and family/work-life balance

A member of the Staff Union Committee, speaking on its behalf, described the progress made in this area, such as the fact that a room had been set aside for nursing mothers.

Point 3.6 of the Committee’s report was adopted.

3.7 Promotion and career development

The President stated that the titularization and personal processes were under way.

Point 3.7 of the Committee’s report was adopted.

3.8 Occupational safety and health

A member of the Staff Union Committee presented the questionnaire on smoking that had been prepared in response to a recommendation adopted at the first session of the Annual General Meeting in February 2007.

The questionnaire had been distributed to all the staff, including those in the field, and participation in the survey had been good. A large number of comments had been sent in on compliance with the circular on smoking, on preventive measures for smokers and against the sale of tobacco products at the ILO.

The replies to the questionnaire were still being analyzed and the outcome would shortly be made public.

A participant challenged the way the questionnaire had been set out and its usefulness. Another participant drew attention to the objectives of the Advisory Committee on Safety and Health (ACOSH), namely the improvement of working conditions and the achievement of genuine results.

One participant commented on the lamentable working conditions on M2, while another focused on the problems raised by the open-space system, especially regarding the area allotted to each official. A member of the Staff Union Committee replied that a general discussion was currently under way on the latter point and that the matter would be followed up.

A participant, observing that information was important, commented on the absence of any reporting arrangements.

One of the first priorities should be to bring about improvements in safety and health conditions in the ILO's field offices.

Point 3.8 of the Committee's report was adopted.

3.9 Improvement of the disputes settlement system

The President reported on the satisfactory collective agreement that had been reached on the subject.

Point 3.9 of the Committee's report was adopted.

3.10 Improvement of communications between external offices and headquarters

The President outlined the progress made in this area.

Point 3.10 of the Committee's report was adopted.

3.11 Activities of joint bodies

The President described the activities of the various joint bodies.

Point 3.11 of the Committee's report was adopted.

3.12 The regions

Africa

The titular member for Africa said that his region greatly appreciated the efforts made by the Staff Union to improve communications with the field.

He said that the region's main objective was to improve working conditions and that the obstacles that arose stemmed from the administration.

With regard to the salary surveys, he observed that the Flemming principle was not always adhered to and that there were salary indexing problems in the region.

Efforts were being made to meet officials' training needs in the region.

A great deal remained to be done in the area of recruitment and selection, and he regretted the fact that decisions had been taken unilaterally, irrespective of the Staff Rules.

In Harare economic conditions were difficult, and the management did little to support their colleagues or to improve working conditions, which had seriously deteriorated in terms of inflation, loans and supplies. The management's circular refusing to grant officials loans had made matters worse.

The Staff Union representative in Abidjan thanked the Committee for its support and described the situation since 2005, when part of the Office had been relocated to Addis Ababa, Dakar, Abuja and Yaounde.

At present there were 14 officials and four colleagues with technical cooperation contracts in the Abidjan Office. Recent developments and the redeployment of the administration offered the country new prospects. There was a general sense of optimism and ILO officials were taking part in meetings with the other United Nations agencies. The ILO's projects were making satisfactory progress and the Office was working very well. He concluded by thanking the titular and substitute members for their support.

Americas

A regional meeting had been held in Lima from 23 to 25 May 2007 at which Staff Union representatives from the region had been able to engage in a productive dialogue with all the directors of regional offices and at which several agreements had been reached. Participants in the meeting had emphasized the need for local recruitment and selection committees and the importance of keeping a close eye on local staff contracts.

There were still problems with salary surveys at the local level, and the regional representative cited the difficulty of making comparisons with certain posts that were generally contracted out by the enterprises used for this purpose. The methodology had

serious shortcomings and needed to be thoroughly reviewed. The Staff Union was planning to carry out survey into the impact of inflation and the devaluation of the dollar on salaries in the region.

He made a few suggestions for improving the functioning of SHIF, which could take advantage of the experience of other United Nations agencies in the region that had negotiated agreements with individual clinics and taken other steps to limit costs.

The Staff Union's representatives in the region had followed closely the situation in Uruguay, the only pilot country in the region for the "One UN" reform process. There had already been an increase in the number of projects in the country had risen, which meant a heavier workload for the national and international staff.

An agreement had been reached with the office of the regional director on the need to improve training for newly recruited officials.

The representative voiced his concern at the deployment of IRIS in the field, which had received much attention. Additional financial and human resources were needed for staff training purposes, and he proposed that a common approach be taken to solving the specific problems that IRIS raised.

Asia

The titular member for Asia noted the increase in the pressure on United Nations staff working in the One UN pilot countries. She added that the lack of advice and clear direction in the reform process meant that many United Nations officials in the pilot countries and elsewhere in the region were increasingly concerned about their future.

She noted that a number of posts in the region had been filled without a competition and regretted this lack of transparency, which had given rise to considerable frustration among the staff.

The failure to fill the post of senior human resources officer in the region had made it difficult for the Staff Union to engage in a constructive dialogue with the administration on the issue of human resources.

The region was proud of the recruitment and selection procedures in Asia, where a Staff Union representative sat on the technical panels and where technical cooperation officials were treated as internal candidates.

There had been discrimination between national and international staff financed by PSI funds, with local staff receiving a one-year contract while international staff contracts had been extended by two years.

On the subject of occupational safety and health, she stated that the terms of reference of the relevant committees had been negotiated and implemented throughout the region.

In conclusion, she asked the Staff Union for its support in devising a training module on the methodology of salary surveys for local staff, so as to economise on the costly training provided by outside bodies.

Europe and Arab States

The titular member for the region informed the participants that a regional meeting had been held in Budapest the previous month and observed that there was an obvious need to establish a set of rules and procedures in the area of human resources. The existing circulars were out of date and communication was poor. More financial resources were required to establish and meet the staff's training needs.

He appealed for more transparency in respect of job mobility, and urged that the whole issue of precarious employment be re-examined. As to the review of the field structure, there was general apprehension about possible reductions in staff.

On the subject of the United Nations reforms, he stressed that the ILO must not lose sight of its goals and objectives. It was important, too, that the ILO share information with the pilot regions engaged in the United Nations reform process.

On the subject of the balance between private life and working life, he noted that some officials in European offices were encountering difficulties with their holidays and flexible hours.

Turin

The representative of the staff at the Turin Centre said that the problems they faced were similar to those described by the previous speakers. He thanked the Staff Union Committee in Geneva, which had always supported the ILO's officials in Turin.

3.13 Former officials

A representative of the section of former officials said that its objective was to provide assistance for former colleagues with their day-to-day problems. He mentioned that the section was a member of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board.

3.14 UNION

The President outlined the precarious financial situation of *Union* magazine and the critical circumstances facing its editors, and said that the Staff Union Committee was making every effort to find a solution that would enable the magazine to continue reflecting the voice of all the staff.

3.15 *Legal advisor*

The President said that there had been no progress regarding the post of legal advisor to the Staff Union, adding that a solution to the question would have to be found at either the diplomatic or the juridical level

A participant drew attention to the enormous help that the legal advisor had given the Staff Union Committee and the staff of the ILO and urged the Committee to take steps to regularize the situation.

The President said that she had taken note of the comments made and thanked the Staff Union secretariat for preparing the Committee's report.

The General Meeting unanimously approved the annual report of the ILO Staff Union Committee for 2006-07.

4. Financial report and addendum: Report of the Auditing Commission (doc.SU/AGM/2007/2/D.3 and D.3 (Add))

The Treasurer outlined the financial situation, drawing attention to the effort made to maintain a balanced budget.

Regarding the report of the Auditing Commission, he confirmed that the Staff Union's account were correct.

The General Meeting unanimously approved the financial report for the period from 1 January to 31 December 2006.

5. Election of the Auditing Commission (doc. SU/AGM/2007/2/D.4)

The President announced that the outgoing members of the Auditing Commission were seeking another mandate and thanked them for their highly professional approach to their work.

The General Meeting unanimously agreed to renew the mandate of the members of the Auditing Commission.

6. Report of the Board of the Staff Union Assistance Fund (doc. SU/AGM/2007/2/D.5)

It was noted that it would be preferable for the Staff Union's annual contribution to be reflected in the Fund's accounts.

The report was adopted unanimously.

7. Arrangements for the elections to the Staff Union Committee and addendum: List of candidates for election to the Staff Union Committee 2007-2009 (doc. SU/AGM/2007/2/D.6 and D.6(Add))

A member of the Staff Union Committee indicated that the next elections would be by electronic voting.

The three returning officers and the members of the Electoral Commission all agreed to their mandate being extended through 2008.

The arrangements were adopted.

8. Other business

8.1 Staff Health Insurance Fund (SHIF) The participants wished to know the Staff Union's position on the amendments to SHIF's Regulations, as it was an import matter.

A member of the Staff Union assured the participants that the Committee was taking the matter seriously and had two main concerns: the financial situation of the Fund, and the principle of solidarity, which the proposed amendments did not respect sufficiently. Further clarification was requested on the future reforms and on health costs. A number of participants asked for more information.

The Fund's secretary said that he was at the staff's disposal for any further information. He added that the proposed amendments, which had been approved by consensus, were the product of two's years' work.

The Chairperson drew the participants' attention to the possibility under the Regulations of calling for a referendum, if they so wished.

The Chairperson thanked the participants in the General Meeting, especially those from the field, and the interpreters.

The session ended at 4.30 p.m.