

Quote"

Statement of the Chairperson of UNHCR Staff Council, Mr. Guy Avognon, at the 67th Session of the Executive Committee, Geneva, 6 October 2016

(Check against delivery)

Mr Chairman,

Distinguished Delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I thank you for this opportunity to address the Executive Committee on behalf of UNHCR staff who faithfully serve our persons of concern both in deep field and Headquarters locations.

I would like to express appreciation to you Mr. Chairman, for your leadership of the Executive Committee over the past year; and also to extend sincere congratulations to newly elected members of the Executive Committee and to our High Commissioner Filippo Grandi for whom this is the first EXCOM meeting.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to highlight a number of key issues on which the Staff Council would like to see positive developments in the best interest of the staff and the Organization.

1. The new HC's vision and linkage with UNHCR People's strategy

We have taken due note of and appreciate the HC's reaffirmation at the beginning of this session, of his vision, based on the UNHCR "People Strategy", which sets out goals for addressing key human resources challenges in UNHCR over the next five years. Of particular interest to us is his commitment to continue investing into the UNHCR workforce, which now stands at more than 15,000 people one third of whom are employed through affiliate workforce arrangements. To achieve this, the support of all stakeholders including you, distinguished delegates will be needed.

2. More inclusion of Staff in decision-making processes

The Staff Council has generally advocated for a constructive dialogue and solutions-oriented consultations with the Management. Over the past months, a number of joint consultations between DHRM and the Staff Council took place to ensure that existing policies are mainstreamed in a manner that preserves staff rights. We have nevertheless observed a number of initiatives recently taken by management outside existing joint staff-management mechanisms such as the Joint Advisory Committee, on matters that have a direct impact on staff welfare and staff rights for example the ongoing discussions on inclusion, diversity and gender. We have cautioned the HC and DHC on the temptation to resort to parallel mechanisms that give the impression of a move to keep staff away from decision making processes on issues that concern them. By the same token, recommendations of bodies like the Joint Review Board (JRB) on postings

and assignments should as much as possible be upheld in the interest of impartiality in the placement of staff, in spite of the well-known pressure from many managers for JRB decisions to be overridden through executive decisions.

3. Sustainable contractual status for staff

At last year's session of EXCOM we had advocated for the adoption of a contracts policy that is "supportive of the long-term retention of highly-performing staff" as stated in the Peoples Strategy. However, the outgoing Administration issued a draft contracts policy where the best a staff member can expect after many years of service is a 3-year contract. The new High Commissioner has promised to revisit this policy after observing the outcome of its implementation. Our hope is that a review will be undertaken in the not so distant future so as to allow the adoption of the three types of contracts provided for in the Staff Rules, i.e. Temporary, Fixed Term and Continuing Appointments. This will go a long way in meeting the fundamental aspirations of staff for stability and job security and allow the organization to count on a dedicated workforce and meet its workforce planning requirements.

4. The massive use of Affiliate workforce

To face the humanitarian emergencies and crisis which shook many parts of the world over the past 5 years UNHCR has massively resorted to what is called the affiliate workforce which constitutes the bulk of hiring. The Staff Council recognizes the need for UNHCR to seek expediency in getting the human resources it needs to deliver its mandate. But every time we undertake a mission to the field we meet with scores of colleagues in the affiliate workforce who express their frustration of performing the same core UNHCR functions as regular staff and are being treated differently. We take the opportunity of this platform to call on the organisation to rethink its policy regarding the disparities created by the use of non-staff and the low morale in many offices due to such a co-habitation.

5. Structural review of oversight functions and impact on staff welfare

UNHCR recently commissioned a review of its oversight functions in order to determine the required capacity to ensure a certain level of internal accountability. The Staff Council values moving towards better efficiency in both Inspection and Investigation functions so that decisions made by the Inspector General's Office (IGO) are impartial. We are nevertheless concerned about the fact that the Council has not been associated with some aspects of this review that have a direct impact on staff welfare and staff rights, in particular regarding the functions of ethics and ombudsman. We will continue to advocate for these functions to remain independent to enable staff to confidently take their grievances to them keeping in mind that they are to remain informal mechanisms for conflict resolution in the workplace.

6. Framework for the future: Inclusion, diversity and gender equity

The Staff Council welcomes the initiative by management to start addressing issues of inclusion, diversity and gender in UNHCR. This is an area of keen interest to the staff council and we stand ready to collaborate with the management for the successful

implementation of the framework and we hope for a participatory approach in handling of these issues.

7. Staff security in complex humanitarian environment

The security of UNHCR staff remains a critical area of interest for the Staff Council. Over the past few months, we lost two colleagues in separate incidents in Somalia. This serves as an acute reminder of the need for a continuous engagement by all stakeholders including you, Distinguished Delegates, to continue to ensure the safety of UNHCR staff operating in unstable areas where their personal safety and security are at a high risk. Countries hosting persons of concern are equally encouraged to continue to enforce security measures to preserve the lives of those who are striving to alleviate the suffering of desperate populations.

8. Career aspirations for National Staff

The Staff Council will not relent in continuing to advocate for better career aspirations for national staff, especially into the international professional category. Measures taken by the administration over the past few years to restrict conversions of national staff have created a lot of frustration in our country operations and this cannot be overlooked. I have discussed this with the High Commissioner not later than last week and will continue to do so in the interest of our colleagues who give their best for the organisation in their respective countries.

9 Implementation of SAL and rotation of senior Managers at Headquarters

Staff are increasingly calling for more rotation of Headquarters based senior managers and fair and improved utilization of staff at Senior levels, to allow for more cross fertilization of competencies, experience, perspectives and dynamics of change for better service delivery to UNHCR's Persons of Concern.

10. Promotions, postings and assignments

Professional staff are eagerly awaiting the results of the review of the our promotions system and have received assurances that the Staff Council will be involved in follow up actions once the results of the review are made public. Very specifically, staff took positively the promise by the high commissioner that the review of our promotions system will be an opportunity to review existing policies on postings, assignments and recruitment. We hope that this promise will be delivered upon in the best interest of staff and the organization.

Conclusion:

Mr. Chairperson,

High Commissioner, Distinguished Delegates,

I take this opportunity to thank you, on behalf of the UNHCR staff worldwide, for your

valuable financial, material and political support to UNHCR's programmes and activities that enable the Organization to carry out its mandate through its staff.

Thank you for your attention.