

STAFFCOUNCIL



**Statement of
Vesna Markovic Dasovic, Chair
UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS/UN WOMEN
Staff Council
First regular session of the
UN Women Executive Board
14-15 February 2022**

Madame President,
Distinguished Members of the Executive Board,
Dear Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure, as the Chair of the UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN Women Staff Council to address the Board today.

Please allow me to start by expressing my deepest sympathy and condolences to you and our UN Women colleagues and their families that have lost loved ones in the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver this statement today.

This Council, together with about **110 country and regional level staff associations**, is fully committed to a strong UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS and UN Women and to the wellbeing of **all personnel**, full time staff members as well as colleagues on all other types of contracts.

Our goal is a healthy workforce in a workplace that provides equal opportunities and ensures dignity and rights for all.

We wish to express our deep appreciation and gratitude to UN Women's senior leadership for making personnel's **wellbeing THE priority** and for engaging with personnel to minimize the impacts.

UN Women personnel should **feel safe and supported** wherever they work from – their offices or homes – and be recognized, valued and have a sense of belonging. The pandemic has forced us to think ahead and imagine a “new normal.” We are encouraged by the flexible approaches that the agencies, including UN Women who have been leading from the front, have taken since the beginning of the pandemic and their consistent and open information sharing with personnel. This needs to continue.

We congratulate UN Women on its new Strategic Plan. We welcome the focus on an empowered workforce to deliver results.

Moving ahead, this and the following areas require ongoing and additional investment and engagement in line with the UN's commitment to decent work standards.

First: Conditions of service, job security and equal opportunities

Our people are our biggest asset and we must keep people at the centre of our vision and strategy. This means that we need to focus on removing all kinds of inequalities in our workforce, including inequalities between people that are in UN language called staff and people that are called “non-staff”. UN Women has a combined work force of about 3,500 personnel, of which

only a third, about 1220 colleagues, are staff as per the ICSC regulations. We are talking about 2/3 of the agency's workforce that is directly affected here.

Additional investments of financial resources are required to ensure that all our personnel are hired based on the UN principle of decent work so that they can deliver the expected results.

We recognize the current trends and nature of funding impacts the agencies' ability to issue staff contracts (temporary, continuing, and fixed term). We also recognize our agencies' efforts to address the shortfalls and a long history of abuse of "non-staff" contract modalities. However, we remain concerned about potential attrition and turnover in personnel owing to the vulnerabilities related to existing contractual modalities. We now have staff and so called "non staff" working side by side performing the same job with different levels of salaries /fees, benefits, and entitlements due to the nature of funding sources or lack of funding. Our reality is that we have a two- or even three-tier class system of personnel in UN Women and the UN system more broadly. This is unacceptable for the United Nations.

The Council represent our staff and personnel in the UNISERV Federation and we continuously urge for harmonization of the use of contractual modalities and a One UN approach, which will provide equal opportunities and support interagency mobility.

We note that more needs to be done by UN Women to eradicate disparities in recruitments both locally and internationally – we can significantly improve, for example, racial and ethnic diversity and geographic representation, as well as representation of persons with disabilities and LGBTQI people. Commitment to the principle of leaving no one behind should start at home. We also need to invest more in ensuring career progression for General Service Staff into Professional roles. This should be done using a talent management approach that grooms our General Service staff and younger professionals for upward progression at UN Women.

We call on you our Executive Board, both as funders and our governance mechanism, to work in all the fora that you have influence in to ensure that we move towards the **eradication of this class system** and towards **transparent and inclusive hiring practices that ensure equal opportunities and decent work conditions for all at UN Women.**

Second: Work Life Balance and Mental Health

Working in the UN has always been a mix of exhilarating, meaningful and stressful work. The COVID 19 pandemic increased mental health issues and there is more to be done to address stigma and fear of the unknown.

We call for increased access to vaccines for our colleagues in duty stations with weak health systems.

As large numbers of our personnel are burned out and face great hardships, we can't stress enough the importance of **continuous dialogue** to support shared responsibility and accountability. We urge the **management at all levels** to exercise a maximum flexibility approach to achieve work-life balance. We welcome the "UN System Model Policy on Flexible Work" adopted by the CEB which strengthens the use of flexible work arrangements, and which no longer ask that personnel provide reasons for their requests. We will continue dialogue with management to translate this model policy into concrete measures.

We recognize that not all managers have the same expectations from their teams, and we urge for a unified people-centered approach in dealing with individual situations – one that applies certain standards across the board, but one also that takes into account individual vulnerabilities. For working parents and caregivers, flexible work arrangements and work-life balance are about surviving and managing this crisis; they are about the **sustainability of the work force, optimal talent management and promoting positive long-term health impacts**. They are also about our rights at work.

Colleagues remain preoccupied and anxious about what a workplace will look like. Best practices and lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis must serve to bring personnel and management closer in a shared understanding of and collective commitment to individual and organizational responsibilities for personnel wellbeing and Duty of Care.

The 2021 Work Trend Index recently outlined findings from a study that involved over 30K people in 31 countries and analysed trillions of productivity and labour signals across Microsoft and LinkedIn.

- Their #1 finding: Flexible work is here to stay; post-pandemic workspaces need to be extremely flexible and hybrid, to succeed
- Another finding: High productivity is masking an exhausted workforce, globally. While employee productivity remained the same or higher, data shows 54% feel overworked, 39% exhausted, and digital exhaustion is a real thing.

We are not immune to these trends. Ask UN Women personnel how they are doing and what they need, to deliver the results to which we are all utterly committed. **Transparency, honest and open dialogue, demonstrated commitment to the values of the UN and shared accountability are essential to thrive in the new world of work.**

All this points to the **need for skilled leadership** – within UN Women and among Member States – to deal with the tough question: Do we sharpen our focus, leveraging our comparative advantages to re- and de-prioritise deliverables, or do we sit by and watch good people look for better opportunities and leave UN Women?

Third: Anti - racism and discrimination

On the important subject of **anti-racism and non-discrimination** – we welcome and fully support UN Women’s commitment to this principle and appreciate the ongoing work, with which we have been engaged as well. **We commend UNOPS for having included Dr. Martin Luther King Day as flexible work holiday in New York and urge UN Women to do the same.** However, racism is a systemic issue that requires ongoing dialogue and education, but also concrete measures to deal with discriminatory and abusive practices, special measures to address past failures and injustices in terms of recruitment, access to opportunities, performance evaluations and career growth. More needs to be done to foster such a culture. This should include improving policies, creating better processes for accountability, stronger measures to protect UN Women colleagues from retaliation, which some personnel still fear.

We understand this is long-term work – so we need to see short-term results and plans for medium- to long-term results.

Conclusion

Finally, we note that the role of Staff Council Representatives is more crucial than ever in today's challenging and stressful times. We have seen the huge demand for the work of the Staff Council. **UN Women is the only agency of the UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS/UN Women Staff Council that does not release a Representative full time or at least part time to serve personnel.** We urge UN Women, in advance of the forthcoming Staff Council elections, to announce the full time release of at least one staff/personnel representative to advocate for the rights of personnel both within UN Women and the UN system.

Madame President, thank you for the opportunity to address the Executive Board. UN Women personnel and we, as their representatives, count on your support as we all aim for a more equal, just and sustainable future for all.

I welcome your feedback and comments.

Thank you.