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**24<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the UNAIDS Programme Coordinating Board**  
**Geneva, Switzerland**  
**22-24 June 2009**

**Statement by the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association**

**Document prepared by the USSA**

**Additional documents for this item:** *none*

**Action required at this meeting - the Programme Coordinating Board is invited to:** note the content of the document.

**Cost implications for decisions:** *none*

## INTRODUCTION

1. Since June 2004 the UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association (USSA) has reported annually to the Programme Coordinating Board. This document serves as additional information to the oral presentation that will be made to the Board by the USSA Chair. The USSA functions as an independent staff association for the UNAIDS Secretariat, while remaining an Associate Member of the WHO Staff Association, and, since 2008, a full member of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA).

## INSTITUTIONAL, POLICY AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

2. In 2008, the Executive Committee of the USSA worked closely with the UNAIDS Administration to review critical institutional, policy and administrative issues affecting UNAIDS staff, including support for the development and enhancement of several UNAIDS policies. Regular, institutionalized meetings with senior management and Human Resources have been successful in strengthening mechanisms for dialogue and partnership between UNAIDS Administration and USSA, and also serve as an effective early-warning system to identify and mitigate potential issues of concern to UNAIDS staff. These forums have also been essential in highlighting urgent issues where staff have been affected by the ongoing problems with the UNAIDS transition to the new computer-based system for finance and administration (ERP). As the number and complexity of issues and staff cases reported to the Staff Association also continues to increase, USSA will continue to pursue its mandate to address these issues with the UNAIDS Administration through prompt and honest dialogue.
3. Highlights and results from 2008 can be summarized as follows:
  - a. **Agreement of Cooperation between with the Staff Association and the UNAIDS Administration:** this was signed in July 2008 and remains unique in the UN system. The Agreement outlines general principles and cooperation structures and procedures and aims to ensure a modern, innovative, successful and constructive relationship between UNAIDS Management and the USSA.
  - b. **Mobility and Career Development:** UNAIDS continued to develop and mature as an organization throughout 2008, with approximately one thousand UNAIDS staff members distributed across Geneva headquarters and over eighty country and regional offices. Feedback from staff consistently indicates their preference that UNAIDS should not simply be considered a "short-term" career path stop. UNAIDS must continue to mature as an "employer of choice" in order to attract and retain staff of the highest quality. The USSA was actively involved in the development of the Organization's new Mobility and Rotation Policy which also formalized USSA's role as an observer on the Mobility Review Committee, helping to ensure due process and fairness in the mobility process. USSA's membership status in the Appointments and Promotions Committee also enables the USSA to advocate that staff promotion, assignment, reassignment and career development issues are treated in a transparent and equitable manner, and raise

issues of due process in individual cases.

- c. **Diversity Issues:** in 2008, USSA also highlighted the issues of rights and benefits for same sex and domestic partnerships for UNAIDS staff and their partners. UNAIDS Staff in Latin America presented a petition to UNAIDS Senior Management requesting equal treatment for staff members in domestic relationships (same sex or opposite sex) with respect to staff benefits and entitlements. USSA is pleased to report that the UNAIDS Administration has taken a proactive position on this issue, and USSA continues to work with them to promote broader and more formal recognition of same sex and domestic partnerships within the larger UN system. A diversity policy, agreed by senior management early in 2009, will be rolled-out throughout the year with provisions for mandatory diversity training for all staff. The aim of the policy being to expand current standards within the broader UN system and promulgate an enhanced policy on diversity and inclusiveness, specifically addressing the issues of HIV status and same sex partnership.
- d. **Contractual Issues:** the issue of UNAIDS staff serving under divergent contracts (either WHO for Geneva-recruited staff, or UNDP for field-recruited staff) continues to be an obstacle to the fair and consistent treatment of UNAIDS staff. In 2008, USSA continued to advocate for equity in contractual status for all staff serving with UNAIDS, irrespective of which body administers their contracts. USSA successfully lobbied to ensure that under the new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with UNDP, any UNAIDS staff member with a UNDP contract has the right to join the local UNDP staff association.<sup>1</sup> USSA also continued to investigate the possibility of UNAIDS staff on UNDP contracts becoming full dues-paying members of USSA; this issue was not resolved in 2008 and will remain a priority in 2009 until a solution is found. In 2009, the Staff Association will also continue to actively provide inputs for the negotiations on the Memoranda of Understanding with both WHO and UNDP.
- e. **Administrative Policies and Issues affecting UNAIDS Staff Well-being:** Important progress was also made by USSA on advocating for issues that ensure the fair and equitable treatment of staff. USSA expressed growing concerns about the selective application of WHO/UNDP staff rules and regulations, as they apply to UNAIDS staff, emphasizing specific concerns around access to the existing exceptions by UNAIDS to WHO or UNDP staff rules and regulations, and the process by which exceptions by UNAIDS to WHO or UNDP rules are made, approved and implemented. USSA received the full support of the UNAIDS Administration on this issue and the clarification of the interpretation and application of staff rules and regulations will remain a priority in 2009. USSA also remains concerned about the WHO Contract Reform initiative (part of the broader efforts for UN Contract Reform) and followed developments on this issue closely with the UNAIDS Administration.
- f. **Environmental Working Group:** the USSA continued its close involvement with

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS country-based staff continue to have the right to join the USSA, even if a member of a local UNDP staff association. As there is currently no method of payroll deduction for membership dues for country-based staff, USSA asks that staff make a contribution to an AIDS-related NGO equivalent to 0.2% of their salary.

the Environmental Working Group (EWG), which aims to help make UNAIDS more energy efficient and environmentally friendly. The EWG advises and supports the Administration in its implementation of the UNAIDS Environmental Policy and associated Green House Rules. The EWG also monitors UNAIDS progress towards the goal of a climate neutral UN.

- g. **Work Life Balance Policy:** as a direct result of support and advocacy from the USSA, UNAIDS developed and adopted a Work-Life Balance Policy, which aims to provide a supportive and enabling work environment that optimizes staff productivity and enhances UNAIDS' position as an employer of choice. By introducing greater flexibility in patterns of work, this policy aims to empower managers and their staff to manage outputs in ways that are more in keeping with reality rather than the traditional fixed-schedule, one-location structure. USSA was pleased to note that the policy was formally adopted by the UNAIDS Administration in late 2008. All UNAIDS staff may now access the provisions under this policy, including the compressed working week. USSA continues to work closely with the Administration on promoting awareness of the Work-Life Balance Policy and its consistent application for all staff.

#### **UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES SINCE THE 20<sup>TH</sup> PROGRAMME COORDINATING BOARD**

4. In addition to its activities related directly to the UNAIDS Administration the USSA has also been able to extend its outreach to staff. Most notably through the agreement and resourcing of participation of the Association in all UNAIDS Regional Management Meetings and New Staff Orientations. This has enabled the USSA to update staff on policy and work-place developments and to run clinics to address staff issues on an individual and confidential basis.
5. In 2008, USSA continued to attract and benefit from the valuable contributions of its staff volunteers who support the discussions and activities of the Staff Association. The volunteers led a successful World AIDS Day Solidarity Lunch and Bake Sale which generated CHF 3,200 for ASFAG (l'Association Solidarité Femmes Africaines de Genève).
6. Finally, the USSA strengthened its collaboration with the UN System HIV Positive Staff Group, known as UN Plus, which ensures that the specific needs and voice of staff members living with HIV are raised, heard and addressed in the broader UN workplace. In March 2008, UN Plus and USSA signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will help UN Plus and the USSA to focus more support and attention on staff members affected by HIV. Key focus areas include stigma and discrimination, health insurance coverage, mobility and travel restrictions for HIV-positive staff, and confidentiality in the workplace.

#### **LOOKING FORWARD**

7. Despite significant improvements and efforts by the UNAIDS Department of Resource Management, the Enterprise Resource Planning system (ERP – known in WHO as GSM) continues to be of concern to staff: salary slips are not available to country staff; errors in salaries continue; and, generally colleagues face daily challenges and stress in trying to implement their workload with a system that can often be a major obstacle. Further, the ERP has not yet been rolled-out in UNAIDS

country offices which creates a two-tier system in availability of information and services to staff. Since its implementation in July 2008, the ERP has been the single largest source of complaints from staff. The USSA remains committed to working with the Administration to resolve this and other issues affecting staff both at Headquarters and in the field.

8. As it appears increasingly likely that the global economic crisis will have a serious impact on the international response to AIDS and, consequently, the UNAIDS Secretariat, the USSA wishes to engage positively with senior management in preparing for, and mitigating against, whatever adverse effects the Organization may face. The USSA also looks forward to working closely with the UNAIDS Administration on the management response to the Second Independent Evaluation.
9. The UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association is pleased to recognize the high degree of continued collaboration and mutual respect in its partnership with the UNAIDS Administration. This partnership is contributing to an improved work environment for all UNAIDS Staff in Geneva and in the field, which in turn helps the Organization to better achieve its goals. Finally, the Association welcomed the initiative of the new Executive Director to hold a face-to-face meeting with the Executive Committee in January 2009, which means not only a recognition of USSA's work but also the commitment of the new Administration to keep staffing issues as a priority of the Organization.
10. The USSA also thanks the Programme Coordinating Board for its continuing support to the work of UNAIDS staff worldwide, and looks forward to its next report to the Board in June 2010.