



www.newwood.org newwood98@hotmail.com

Position Paper Regarding the Memorandum on “Additional delegation of authority in the administration of the staff”, Dated 26 March 2020

1. On 7 May 2020, Members and Supporters of the **New Wood Staff Union of the United Nations**, affiliated to the Communauté Genevoise d'Action Syndicale (CGAS) and the Union Syndicale Suisse (USS) and represented at the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council (SCC), became aware of the above-mentioned Memorandum.
2. We, **New Wood**, highlight the fact that the Memorandum was issued during the outbreak of the COVID-19 global pandemic and that, as informed by the Executive Secretary of the SCC, staff representatives have not been consulted prior to its issuance.
3. We consider this memorandum to be in contradiction not only with the Staff Rules and Regulations (namely, Regulation 8.1), but also with the provisions of the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and with the General Principles of the International Civil Service Law. The Memorandum should not have been issued without prior consultation with Staff Representatives as required by Regulations 8.1 and 8.2.
4. We, therefore, question the legitimacy of this Memorandum in its entirety, in addition to protesting the timing of its issuance and alerting to the concerns that it causes.
5. Furthermore, we recall that the UN, in its SDG 8 targets related to inclusive economic growth, has expressed full support for the ILO standards on Decent Work, which is crucial for achieving inclusive economic growth, since decent work is more than just a source of income and social protection. Decent work provides people with social identity, dignity and self-respect. *Target 8.5 recognizes* “full and productive employment and decent work” as an objective and, moreover, extends this objective to “all women and men” and target 8.8 (protecting labour rights and promoting safe and secure working environments) concerns guaranteeing fundamental rights and protections that all people ought to enjoy in the world of work.¹ The UN should be leading by example and steer away from endangering job security for its own staff, if only to safeguard its credibility vis-à-vis its Member States.
6. We recall that, on 11 March 2020, WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, and that, as from 16 March, a ‘stay-at-home’ telecommuting request was issued to all staff members (except a small number of critical staff). This situation is still ongoing and is set to continue for several more weeks, or until the pandemic is over. We consider that the issuance of a memorandum with such far-reaching consequences as the March 26 memo during these exceptionally uncertain times is unethical.
7. We, **New Wood**, call for systematic prior consultations and negotiations with staff unions worldwide, including with New Wood, in order to foster and strengthen a constructive and

permanent dialogue between Staff and the Administration in defence of the very values that the UN stands for, to ensure efficient management of the Organization's human resources while safeguarding job security.

8. We also consider not informing staff as a purposeful lack of transparency. It is not acceptable that Administration did not broadcast the contents of the Memo that can put the family and future of each and every staff member at risk, especially during a time of great vulnerability.
9. In view of the above, we are obliged to ask the Secretary General:
 - a. to reconsider his decision on sub-delegation of authority in the context of a planned downsizing and open an effective dialogue, in good faith, with Staff Representatives; this dialogue should take place particularly in the light of Targets 5 and 8 of the SDG 8 on decent work jointly with the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and Human Rights in addition to the Staff Rules and Regulations as well as the general principles of international civil service law;
 - b. to keep under close monitoring how any envisaged reduction of posts is carried out in order to uphold the Staff Rules and Regulations and avoid arbitrary termination of contracts and abuse of authority; and
 - c. to involve Staff Representatives and the staff at large in prior consultations on any downsizing exercise as envisaged since 2016 or on any massive reduction of posts, as their very livelihoods and the future of their families will be at stake.
10. We also obtained legal advice that further corroborates our stand regarding the abovementioned Memo.
11. We, **New Wood**, reiterate that we remain committed to the values of the Organization and that our basic and highest priority was, is and will always remain to guarantee decent and solid defence of staff rights to each of our members, to ensure that the interests and rights of all Geneva-based UN staff are duly defended, and to provide staff with assistance as and when they need it.

Geneva, 22 May 2020

New Wood Staff Union of the United Nations

www.newwood.org

For labour rights in the international organizations



¹ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---inst/documents/publication/wcms_712685.pdf and <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>