



***United Nations
Field Staff
Union Council
Meeting FSC
XXXII***

UNGSC, Brindisi,
3rd – 7th March
2025



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Executive Summary

The 32nd Annual Council Meeting of the United Nations Field Staff Union (UNFSU), held in March 2025, convened representatives from missions and departments across the UN system to address critical issues impacting field personnel. The session opened with remarks by the new Director of the United Nations Global Service Centre (UNGSC), Mr. Anton Antchev, who acknowledged the evolving peacekeeping landscape and emphasized staff-centered transition strategies as missions close or downsize. The UNFSU President, Milan Dawoh, highlighted major accomplishments over the past year, including historic staff placement success, growth in membership, strengthened staff-management dialogue, and increased financial resilience.

Virtual sessions were held with UNISERV, OHR, ICSC, CIGNA, UNHLIS, and an in-person presentation by the UNFCU. Sessions addressed challenges related to job security, mental health, mobility, compensation, diplomatic status, and access to health services and financial systems. These exchanges reinforced the Union's role as a vital channel between staff and senior leadership, especially during periods of uncertainty and institutional change.

Workshops and thematic sessions such as the anti-racism briefing and ethical leadership training offered opportunities for reflection and collective strategy-building. Council debates also addressed mobility restrictions, inconsistent entitlements, internal communication barriers, and the emotional toll of mission closures. Mission-specific segments brought forward field realities from Haiti, South Sudan, Colombia, and beyond, shedding light on staff welfare, safety, housing, and equity concerns.

The Council reviewed and approved the 2024 financial report and 2025 budget, endorsing continued strategic investments and visibility initiatives. Two working groups were created: one to review the UNFSU Constitution in light of the recommendations of the Arbitration Committee and another to examine long term challenges to the FSU Executive. In closing, the Council reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening advocacy, safeguarding staff rights, and maintaining union relevance amid a shifting UN environment.

List of attendees

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Mr. Milan Victor Dawoh | UNFSU Executive |
| Mr. Paul James Smith | UNFSU Executive |
| Ms. Jackline Sarah Omondi | UNFSU Executive |
| Ms. Rosa Colucci | UNFSU Executive Office |
| Mr. Stephen Towler | Treasurer |
| | |
| Mr. ABREU, Jose Luis | BINUH |
| Mr. STEPANOVIC, Dejan | Entebbe |
| Mr. CONTEH, Samuel Sarrah | MINURSO |
| Mr. CAESAR JR, Louis Blopai | MINUSCA |
| Mr. LOUIS, Reynold | MONUSCO |
| Ms. ANNETTE, Eva | UNFICYP |
| Ms. COLAWAI, Asenaca | UNAMA |
| Mr. CUPIC, Nenad | UNAMI |
| Mr. FERNANDEZ DUARTE, Jairo | UNVMC |
| Mr. BERNATEAU, Emmanuel | UNDOF |
| Ms. POLLOCK, Nino | UNIFIL |
| Mr. BLAMO II, S. Michael | UNISFA |
| Ms. WAGNER, Alexandra | UNMIK |
| Mr. CULBREATH, Derrick | UNMISS |
| Ms. YOUNES EL AZZI, Ingrid-Ranah | UNGSC |
| Mr. HELAL, Mohammed | UNSOS/UNTMIS |

Welcoming Statement

The newly appointed Director of the UN Global Service Centre (UNGSC) addressed the Field Staff Union Council on his first day, thanking the Executive and staff representatives for their continuous engagement. He emphasized the critical role of staff advocacy amid ongoing changes in peacekeeping operations. Drawing on his extensive experience in field missions, he noted the increasing uncertainty surrounding the future of multidimensional peacekeeping and the growing trend of mission downsizing and closures. He stressed the importance of a fair and well-structured approach to staff transitions in this evolving environment.

The Director praised recent successful staff transition efforts as potential models for future mission closures. He called for staff to be prioritized during reassignment and for leadership to ensure transparent and equitable recruitment practices. Looking forward, he encouraged representatives to offer honest career guidance to colleagues, especially given the limited integration of peacekeeping staff into other UN bodies. He concluded by reaffirming his dedication to supporting the Field Staff Union and championing the rights of field personnel as the organization adapts to new peace operations led by regional partners.

Opening Statement

Mr. Milan Dawoh, President of the United Nations Field Staff Union (UNFSU), officially opened the 32nd UNFSU Council Meeting, welcoming Vice Presidents Ms. Jackline Omondi and Mr. Paul Smith, Administrative Assistant Ms. Rosa Colucci, and newly appointed consultant Ms. Anna Sassu.

In his remarks, Mr. Dawoh emphasized the core mission of UNFSU to protect and promote the rights and welfare of field staff while upholding the principles of the United Nations. He acknowledged the challenges posed by recent mission closures in Mali, Sudan, and Iraq and ongoing uncertainties in Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

Key Achievements and Advocacy Efforts:

- Largest-ever staff placement success: Over 400 staff members from downsizing missions have been successfully reassigned, setting a record
- Strengthened staff-management relations: Continuous engagement with UN leadership has ensured better job security and fairer hiring processes.
- Growth in UNFSU membership: The union has substantially increased in size, marking unprecedented growth in 26 years, resulting in increased revenue and strategic financial investments.
- Advancements in staff welfare programs: Efforts have focused on mental health support, flexible work arrangements, and fair treatment in hiring processes.

Future Priorities:

- Enhancing job security through continued strategic engagement with UN senior leadership.
- Advocating on equitable career opportunities to ensure fairness and inclusivity for all staff members.
- Expanding mental health and well-being initiatives, adapting them to the evolving challenges of UN field staff
- Championing transparency, accountability, and respect in workplace policies and leadership practices.

He stated that “We must continue to address the challenges that lie ahead with determination and unity. We must remain vigilant in safeguarding the rights of our staff while championing a culture of transparency, accountability, and respect”

Mr. Dawoh concluded by acknowledging the dedication and resilience of field staff, reiterating that despite the challenges ahead, the UNFSU remains committed to shaping a just, inclusive, and empowering work environment.

Brief from UNISERV President (VTC)

Ms. Karin Audrey Esposito, President of UNISERV, addressed the Field Staff Union Council (FSU) via video teleconference (VTC), providing an overview of UNISERV’s role, ongoing policy discussions, and the impact of recent developments on UN personnel.

UNISERV’s Role and Representation

UNISERV, the United Nations International Civil Servants Federation, is a system-wide staff federation that represents UN personnel across multiple common system organizations. The Field Staff Union (FSU) holds two executive seats within UNISERV, playing a key role in ensuring that field staff concerns particularly those serving in hardship duty stations are represented at the system-wide level.

Ms. Esposito emphasized that UNISERV’s primary objective is to act as a unified voice for UN staff in consultation with senior UN management and indirectly with Member States. Through policy engagement and advocacy, UNISERV ensures that working conditions, recruitment practices, entitlements, and overall staff welfare are consistently addressed.

Key Issues Highlighted

1. Staff Advocacy and Policy Representation

UNISERV works to ensure that field staff perspectives are integrated into system-wide policies, including compensation reviews, hardship classifications, local salary scales, and security policies. Given the ongoing downsizing of peacekeeping missions, the federation monitors the application of staff transition policies, ensuring they are implemented fairly and equitably.

2. Strengthening Staff Representation

Ms. Esposito emphasized that effective staff representation relies on strong engagement at all levels. She encouraged FSU representatives to actively document and report policy issues, enabling UNISERV to effectively advocate on their behalf. She highlighted the importance of narrative data meaning real-life cases and staff experiences, to counter arguments that dismiss union concerns as anecdotal.

3. Challenges in the Current UN Landscape

The UN system is facing liquidity constraints and budget reductions, which are impacting personnel across multiple UN entities.

The recent closure of missions in Mali, Sudan, and Iraq, along with anticipated changes in MONUSCO, reflect a broader shift away from large-scale peacekeeping operations.

Agencies, funds, and programs (AFPs) are also experiencing financial strain, with organizations facing funding uncertainties due to donor withdrawals.

Call to Action for FSU Representatives

Ms. Esposito urged FSU members to remain engaged and proactive, emphasizing that union strength is built through active participation, evidence-based advocacy, and collaboration with UNISERV. She stressed the following:

FSU could continue documenting cases and challenges affecting field staff, ensuring that real staff concerns inform policy discussions at the highest levels.

Continuous dialogue is necessary to safeguard staff rights and ensure policies reflect the realities of field operations.

Impact of Financial Constraints on UN Staff

During the Q&A session, Ms. Esposito addressed concerns about the financial challenges affecting various UN entities, particularly in the wake of donor funding cuts and the U.S. stop-work order. She explained that:

There is ongoing uncertainty regarding staff reductions and discussions on downsizing policies for non-mission settings are expected in the upcoming Staff-Management Committee (SMC) meetings.

The long-term implications of financial cuts on UN staff remain unclear, but UNISERV continues to monitor developments and advocate for fair treatment of personnel.

Ms. Esposito reaffirmed UNISERV's commitment to supporting field staff, ensuring that their concerns remain a top priority in all system-wide discussions. She encouraged continued collaboration between FSU and UNISERV to strengthen advocacy efforts.

In closing, she reiterated that UNISERV executives remain available to assist with any issues, particularly those related to the compensation package review, job security, and downsizing.

Anti – Racism Discussion

The anti-racism session was led by Ms. Mojankunyane Gumbi, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General on Addressing Anti-Racism in the Workplace. Ms. Alcinda Manuel Honwana, Director of the Anti-Racism Office and Mr. Arthur Kibbelaar Senior Adviser at the Anti-racism Office. The discussions provided an overview of the UN's anti-racism efforts, the establishment of the Anti-Racism Office, ongoing initiatives, and challenges in implementing racial equity across the organization.

Ms. Alcinda Honwana opened the session by highlighting the UN's commitment to addressing racism within its own structures. She provided historical context, explaining that the Anti-Racism Office was established following a 2020 staff petition in response to George Floyd's killing, which prompted calls for internal reforms on racial discrimination within the UN system. She outlined key milestones, including the creation of a Task Force in 2020, the launch of the Strategic Action Plan on Addressing Racism and Promoting Dignity for All in 2022, and the official establishment of the Anti-Racism Office by the General Assembly in 2023.

The Strategic Action Plan addresses racism and racial discrimination in all its dimensions: interpersonal, institutional, systemic and structural. The work of the Anti-Racism Office is structured around three core pillars: advocacy and awareness raising; transparency and institutional reform; and accountability and racial justice.

The advocacy component focuses on promoting racial equity through training, dialogues, the transparency, pillar is dedicated to reviewing policies and norms to ensure racial equity in hiring, promotions, and workplace culture. The accountability aspect strengthens internal justice mechanisms to address racial discrimination complaints and improve protections against retaliation. It also includes mechanisms to strengthen accountability by senior leaders.

A key discussion point was the lack of racial data within the UN Secretariat, making it difficult to track racial diversity and representation. Following extensive discussions, the UN has approved the collection of race-related data, which will be integrated into Inspira and HR systems in 2025. The office has also launched interactive training programs on racial bias, microaggressions, and workplace inclusion, alongside expanding mentorship initiatives and discussions on institutional change.

The UNISFA FSU committee chairperson proposed the official inclusion of a member from the FSU committee to the list of focal points for diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism in the various field missions. The measure will increase access to the focal points, contributions from staff members given their close relationship and confidence place in the elected officials. There was a favorable response from the Special Adviser. Ms. Gumbi emphasized that the UN must remain a model for racial justice, recognizing and addressing systemic biases that affect hiring, promotions, and workplace culture. She acknowledged that while the creation of the Anti-Racism Office is a step forward, meaningful institutional change requires collective effort from staff unions, leadership, and individual employees. She concluded by stressing that the UN's commitment to racial justice must be reflected internally, with policies that actively promote diversity, inclusion, and accountability.

Briefing on Executive Activities and Achievements

Ms. Jackline Omondi, the Vice President, presented the UNFSU Executive's activities and accomplishments from October 2023 to March 2025.

Outreach support mechanism to Int'l downsize missions' staff - ST/AI/2023/1

The availability of policy framework ST/AI/2023/1 [ST.AI.2023.1.pdf](#) and the emphasis placed on the issue in a variety of memoranda from USG, DMSPC, and USG, DOS, significantly influenced the FSU outreach support on downsizing staff selection.

[Memo from DMSPC on downsizing to HoEs 11 April 2023.pdf](#);

[OHR Policy Guidelines Closure of entity MINUSMA OHR-PG-2023-4-REV.1 1.pdf](#)

[Memo from DMSPC DOS USGs to HoEs on UNITAMS context 12 December 2023.pdf](#)

[Closure of UNITAD and impact on head of entity responsibilities on Downsizing or restructuring Signed by DMSPC-DOS.pdf](#)

[DOS-2024-03383 MINUSMA Liquidation Team Draft memo to HoEs re priority consideration - Signed.pdf](#)

She highlighted the amicable working relationship established between FSU and the missions' CHROs, wherein most missions will enquire to determine if any downsized staff have applied for job openings in instances where hiring managers noted in their selection recommendation memos that there were no downsized applicants. She also highlighted the database that FSU created to track and monitor all applications and selections to verify adherence to the policy framework, and consistent, robust communication with the leadership of the missions. A guideline on frequently asked questions was developed by DMSPC and DOS. [HRSD FAQ on priority consideration for downsized staff members \(December 2024\).pdf](#)

Statistical data:

- 80% of the statistics for selection decisions for the downsized Missions personnel are based on the downsized policy framework and not flagging.
- 60 UNITAMS from the 29th of February 2024 to date, from workload analysis.
- 385 MINUSMA from October 2023 to date, from workload analysis.
- 32 UNITAD Staff placement from July 2024 to date, from workload analysis.
- She emphasized Mr. Mark Polane, former UNFSU President remarks in one of the postings on downsize policy framework: *“What has been the net effect of the policy on staff in terms of retention and placement vs. lay-offs? Are any adjustments needed to the policy? Have all UN entities implemented the policy?”* A vital point for critical analysis.

Support to our National Staff from Downsize Missions

- The initiative for advocacy and support system to the national staff in prioritizing those qualified for UNV job opportunities was initiated in response to a request

from the leadership of downsized missions, highlighting concerns of disparity and preferential treatment towards international staff, coupled with inadequate support system for national staff.

- The above resulted in a productive engagement with the UNV Bonn Senior Leadership in June 2024.
- We emphasized the existing deficiencies in the support system for the national staff and the potential for increased efficiency by leveraging their on-the-job skills set, competence, and institutional knowledge to allow maximization of operational productivity without the need for additional capacity building, which is an asset.
- **Outcome:** The UNV Bonn explicitly stated that the decision to select candidates is contingent upon the recruiting Missions/UN Agencies, Funds, and Programs. Nevertheless, candidates who meet the eligibility criteria will be shortlisted and their names will be forwarded to the recruiting entities as priority listing. We have had a positive outcome of at least more than 10 national staff recruited as Int'l UNVs from downsized missions.
- This initiative has been successfully replicated and adopted to support all downsized missions' national staff.

United Nations International Civil Servants Federation (UNISERV) Engagement

- Two Vice President positions are held by the UNFSU Executive in the UNISERV Executive Committee.
- UNISERV Focal Point for ICSC Working Group (WG) on the Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions (ACPAQ).
- UNISERV Focal Points for Personal Transitional Allowance (PTA) Working Group.
- UNISERV Focal Points for Tripartite Working Group on the 2024 Mid-Year Review and End-Year Review of Field Duty Stations according to the conditions of life.
- UNISERV Focal Point for the Inter-Agency Security Management Network (IASMN).
- UNISERV Focal Point for ICSC Working Group-3 on Comprehensive Review of UN Entitlements for the Field.
- UNISERV Focal Point and a member of UN System Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy Implementation Board.
- UNISERV Focal Point on Insurance Working Group for UN System Mental Healthy Strategy.
- Roster: Despite the existence of a framework on the United Nations Mutual Recognition of Roster (UNMRR) Initiative for the UN Common System, the statistics regarding those who have benefited from the UNMRR remain elusive.

Staff Management Committee (SMC)

- UNFSU holds two positions as part of the Staff Management Committee in line with ST/SGB/274 on Staff Management Consultation Machinery.
- The staff representatives designated the FSU President, as the single representative of staff views to the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly for the period (April 2024 to April 2025).

- Continuous engagement in consultation, negotiation, mediation, and discourse with the senior leadership and other UN staff union bodies on administrative policies, and practices.
- Focal Point for the SMC Working Groups (WG) on staff mobility and selection, as well as the WG on time release and facilities for staff representatives.
- Focal Point for the SMC Working Groups (WG) on the draft ST/AI on the administration of appointments.

Continuous Support Systems

- Continuous support to international Field Staff on individual cases related to the welfare and well-being of various staff members, including liaison with Cigna, missions' leadership, recruitment cases, performance appraisals cases, Office of Staff Legal Assistance (OSLA), the Management Advice and Evaluation Section (MAES), DMSPC-OHR, DOS, Ombudsman Office, UNJSPF, Regional Support Centers, and other partners.
- UNFSU Executive Missions Visits MONUSCO, RSCE, UNSOS/UNTMIS, UNITAMS, MINUSMA, UNITAD, UNVMC, and UNOCA.
- UNFCU Annual Council Meeting FSU-XXXI: 2024 and FSU-XXXII 2025.

In terms of financial management, Vice President Paul Smith provided a brief summary on the UNFSU's financial status and investment strategies. A significant achievement has been the strategic investment of union contributions, with \$750,000 placed in different term deposits through UNFCU, generating an estimated \$24,000 return over 12 months. The executive has also optimized travel expenses, reducing unnecessary costs and favoring virtual participation where possible.

President Milan Dawoh concluded the session by emphasizing the resilience of the UNFSU executive and the significant progress made over the past year. He highlighted that UNFSU membership has nearly doubled, financial stability has increased, and staff advocacy efforts have successfully influenced policy decisions. He stressed the importance of continued engagement from field staff, noting that policy decisions must reflect the real challenges faced on the ground. In his closing remarks, he reaffirmed UNFSU's commitment to representing and protecting the rights of UN field staff, stating that despite growing challenges, the union remains steadfast in its mission to serve as the leading voice for UN field staff worldwide.

"This is the most difficult time to be a staff representative. Missions are closing, resources are tightening, and challenges are mounting. But the work we do here is more important than ever. The staff are looking to us for leadership, and we will not fail them" Milan Dawoh, UNFSU President

The briefing on executive activities and achievements demonstrated that UNFSU has been highly proactive in advocating for staff rights, influencing policy decisions, and ensuring financial sustainability. The session concluded with a call to action for field representatives to engage actively in union efforts and a commitment to strengthening UNFSU's role as the leading voice for UN field staff worldwide.

VTC with Mr. Jonathan Ball, Office of Human Resources (OHR) and Chief of Strategy and Policy Development

The discussion began with Jonathan Ball acknowledging the importance of staff-management engagement and the Field Staff Union's active role in advocating staff concerns. He noted the current liquidity crisis within the UN system, explaining that ASG Martha Helena Lopez was unable to join as she was dealing with the financial situation alongside the Controller's Office. Despite these financial pressures, he emphasized the value of ongoing discussions with staff representatives, particularly through the Staff Management Committee, which had significantly increased its meetings to address pressing concerns.

One of the main issues raised by the Field Staff Union was the downsizing policy and its inconsistent application across missions. Representatives expressed frustration over delays in flagging staff for priority consideration when their positions were being abolished, limiting their chances of securing alternative employment. There was a particular concern regarding the upcoming closure of UNAMI, with staff representatives questioning why affected personnel had to wait until October to be flagged when it was already known that their contracts would end in December. They argued that earlier flagging would give staff a fairer chance to apply for jobs in other missions before the holiday period, when hiring traditionally slows down.

Jonathan Ball clarified the current approach, stating that the priority flag is only applied once a termination letter is issued, as per the downsizing policy, which is based on the UN staff rules and legal precedents. He explained that while missions are encouraged to inform staff about potential job losses as early as possible, the formal flagging system is designed to prioritize those closest to termination. Despite understanding the logic behind staff concerns, he reiterated that this approach was intentional to ensure fairness in the process.

Another contentious issue was the inconsistency in termination indemnities across missions. Staff representatives pointed out that while MINUSMA staff had received enhanced termination indemnities, personnel in UNAMI were informed that they would not receive the same benefits. This led to accusations of discrimination and unfair treatment, particularly since all staff operated under the same UN rules and regulations. Jonathan Ball acknowledged these concerns and stressed that termination indemnities are determined based on each mission's financial situation and the discretion of its leadership. He recognized the frustration caused by these inconsistencies and committed himself to discussing the matter further within OHR and the Staff Management Committee (SMC).

Concerns Over Delegation of Authority and Inconsistent Policy Implementation

A major theme throughout the discussion was the delegation of authority and its impact on policy implementation across different missions. Representatives voiced concerns that decentralizing HR decision-making had created disparities in the application of policies, particularly on issues like agreed terminations, staff downsizing, and flexible work arrangements (FWA). They argued that while delegation of authority allows missions to have some level of autonomy, it should not lead to vastly different outcomes for staff depending on where they serve.

Mr. Ball acknowledged these concerns but maintained that delegation of authority is a fundamental part of UN management reforms. He pointed out that while it allows missions to operate efficiently within their specific contexts, there should be consistency in applying core UN HR policies. He encouraged staff representatives to escalate cases of systemic inconsistencies so that OHR could address them through policy clarifications, managerial guidance, and discussions at the SMC.

One of the concrete action points from this discussion was the upcoming discussion on delegation of authority at the SMC meeting in April 2025, where delegation of authority is a standing item. The FSU was encouraged to raise their concerns formally at the SMC plenary.

Flexible Work Arrangements (FWA) and Mental Health Implications

Staff representatives also raised concerns about the inconsistent application of flexible work arrangements (FWA), particularly for international staff in non-family duty stations. They argued that in non-family high-stress environments, where staff live and work in confined compounds for extended periods, the FWA modality of telecommuting from outside the mission area is the only means of achieving work-life balance. However, some missions were reportedly denying FWA requests arbitrarily under the broad justification of “operational requirements”.

Moreover, UNTMIS/UNSOS FSU Chair highlighted a concern about an HR broadcast claiming reference to OHR directives that FWA cannot be combined with R&R. The concern was that not only that this would be defeating the purpose of work-life balance but also is unlawful as that provision is not stipulated in either the FWA ST/SGB nor the R&R ST/AI.

Mr. Ball acknowledged that FWA is not an entitlement, but a discretionary arrangement based on operational needs. However, he emphasized that any denial of FWA must be properly justified and documented. He urged staff representatives to report cases where FWA was being unfairly denied so that OHR could assess potential systemic issues. He asked that the broadcast banning the combination of FWA with R&R be shared with him for further investigation.

Additionally, staff representatives highlighted the impact of mental health challenges in the field, particularly in high-stress missions. They pointed out that despite the UN's mental health strategy, policies like FWA and mobility remain rigid and do not adequately support staff well-being. Mr. Ball agreed that mental health considerations should be integrated into HR policies more effectively, and he acknowledged that a review of policies from a mental health and well-being perspective was underway. However, he urged staff representatives to ensure that mental health-related requests were properly documented and justified when advocating for changes.

Concerns About Mobility and Roster Exemptions

The mobility exercise was another point of contention. Some staff representatives reported that downsizing staff were being excluded from mobility exercises, particularly in cases like UNAMI, where staff wanted to apply for other missions but were being denied due to the impending closure. Conversely, some staff from other missions, such as South Sudan, were actively trying to transfer to UNAMI in order to qualify for future agreed termination benefits.

Jonathan Ball acknowledged these concerns but stressed that mobility must align with the organization's strategic workforce planning needs. He reiterated that staff should

not be moved into missions that are expected to close, as this would increase financial liabilities and create unrealistic expectations.

Additionally, the issue of rostering requirements for priority candidates was raised. Some staff reported that downsized staff were being rejected from new roles simply because they were not on a roster, despite having the necessary qualifications. This contradicted the downsizing policy, which states that priority staff should be considered even if they are not rostered. Mr. Ball assured the FSU that OHR would continue to support entities in ensuring that hiring managers adhered to the policy.

Recovery of Overpayments and Staff Financial Security

Another concern raised was the recovery of overpayments, where staff members who had been inadvertently overpaid found themselves having their salaries deducted at high rates, often without being informed prior and being allowed to plan causing financial distress. Mr. Ball clarified that UN policy requires entities to allow staff to repay overpayments in installments. He urged staff to report any cases where repayment plans were not respected, so OHR could intervene if necessary.

Closing Remarks and Next Steps

As the discussion concluded, Mr. Ball reiterated that he valued the engagement with the Field Staff Union and recognized the critical role they play in ensuring staff welfare. He encouraged them to continue reporting systemic issues and assured them that OHR was committed to addressing concerns related to downsizing, FWA, mobility, and indemnity discrepancies.

Key follow-up actions for the Council included:

1. Reviewing the inconsistent application of termination indemnities across missions.
2. Ensuring proper implementation of the downsizing policy, including priority flagging and the rostering exemption for downsized staff.
3. Assessing the concerns raised about mobility restrictions and potential solutions.
4. Addressing inconsistent application of FWA, restrictions on particularly telecommuting from outside the mission area for staff in non-family duty stations and the broadcast banning the combination of FWA with R&R.
5. Discussing delegation of authority and HR policy inconsistencies at the April 2025 SMC plenary.
6. Following up on concerns about overpayment recovery policies and ensuring staff are given fair repayment options.

The session ended with a commitment to an ongoing dialogue, with staff representatives expressing appreciation for the transparency of the discussion.

Workshop with Mr. Helmut Buss & Mr. Louis Germain:

Working Conditions, Staff Rights, Leadership Practices, Institutional Structure Power and Authority at Work, how to make Organizations Function, Ethics of Office Accountability

On the second day of the UN Field Staff Union Council Meeting, a workshop was conducted to address fundamental issues related to staff rights, leadership practices, and organizational accountability. The session began with an introduction by the President, who welcomed the workshop presenters and outlined the objectives for the discussions.

The workshop was led by Mr. Helmut Buss, former Director of the Ethics Office at the UN, and Mr. Louis Germain, a senior expert in institutional governance and leadership. Their presentation provided an in-depth analysis of key aspects affecting UN personnel, covering working conditions, staff rights, and leadership practices. They emphasized the significance of ethical conduct and institutional accountability within the UN system, offering insights into the structure of power and authority in the workplace. The discussion focused on navigating organizational dynamics and ensuring that institutions function effectively while upholding ethical standards.

Throughout the session, participants engaged in discussions on leadership effectiveness and mechanisms for promoting accountability within UN missions. The interactive format encouraged staff representatives to share their experiences and raise concerns regarding institutional structures and policies. Practical case studies were analyzed to deepen understanding of challenges faced in the field and explore strategies to address them.

The workshop provided a platform for reflection on leadership roles and responsibilities within the UN, highlighting the importance of ethical decision-making and staff advocacy. As the session concluded, key takeaways were reviewed, and participants discussed how to apply the lessons learned to their respective missions. The day marked a crucial moment in reinforcing staff capacity and strengthening advocacy efforts within the UN system.

VTC Session Summary: CIGNA & UNHLIS

On March 6 the Field Staff Union (FSU) convened a virtual session with representatives from CIGNA and UNHLIS during the 2025 Council Meeting to engage on long-standing health insurance-related challenges affecting field-based personnel. The meeting served as a critical platform to express staff concerns, seek clarity on entitlements, and strengthen the relationship between Third-Party Administrator for the UN Worldwide Plance, the UN Health and Life Insurance Section, and the global field staff community.

The FSU reiterated the importance of transparent communication, equitable access to health services across all duty stations, and timely resolution of individual and systemic issues. In response, CIGNA and UNHLIS reaffirmed their commitment to ongoing collaboration, responsiveness to staff feedback, and process improvements.

Staff representatives also inquired from UNHLIS about the eligibility for After Health Insurance Service (ASHI) and especially the eligibility of retirees selecting pension withdrawal settlement. The UNHLIS representative advised that ASHI requirements are GA mandated, therefore ASHI is not provided for staff members who opt for pension withdrawal settlement for the lack of a monthly income necessary for automatic deductions.

The session underscored the value of direct dialogue and accountability, especially in the context of remote and high-risk duty stations, where access to care and insurance-related procedures are often more complex.

As a result of the discussion, several immediate follow-up actions were agreed upon, including a formal written response from CIGNA addressing outstanding issues and the possibility of enhanced coordination between healthcare providers, UN entities, and field missions.

This engagement marks a step forward in ensuring that the health and well-being of UN field personnel remain a shared priority, with the FSU continuing to monitor developments and advocate for fair and efficient service provision.

VTC Session Summary: ICSC

The Field Staff Union Annual Council Meeting included an in-depth virtual dialogue with the core leadership of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) Secretariat. The ICSC was represented by Yuri Orlov (Officer-in-Charge and Chief of the Salaries and Allowances Division), Ramnath Mahadevan (Officer-in-Charge of the Human Resources Policies Division), and Roberto Pagan (Chief of the Cost-of-Living Division). The session offered both an overview of the ICSC's current agenda and a direct Q&A with staff representatives, covering key themes such as post adjustment, hardship classifications, danger pay, rest and recuperation (R&R), and systemic compensation challenges.

Mr. Orlov began by outlining the ICSC's structure and ongoing workstreams. He reminded participants that the Commission composed of 15 members elected by the General Assembly is a subsidiary technical body tasked with regulating and coordinating conditions of service across the UN common system. He highlighted that 2025 marks the Commission's 50th anniversary and noted that the upcoming 99th and 100th sessions would address a wide range of strategic topics.

Among the priority issues on the agenda were the standards of conduct for international civil servants, a comprehensive review of the compensation package, and the continuation of the Noblemaire studies evaluating the suitability of the U.S. Federal Civil Service as the UN's salary comparator. He also cited surveys underway at various headquarters duty stations including Montreal, and upcoming ones in Paris and New York alongside critical work on support for staff with disabilities, flexible working arrangements, and gender-based attrition, particularly the mid-career exit of women professionals.

Mr. Mahadevan elaborated on the Commission's work on hardship classifications and rest and recuperation frameworks. He explained the three general categories of hardship classification: regular reviews by region every three years; temporary classifications issued when new duty stations are opened; and special temporary classifications for emergency scenarios. He highlighted Lebanon as a recent case where special temporary classifications were applied first to Tyre (D, then E level) based on the evolving security situation, and later to Beirut and other duty stations in the country. He further clarified that these changes required careful consultations with the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) and the UN DHMOSH which took time. Caution was also needed where situations were rapidly evolving.

He also addressed confusion surrounding the R&R framework. He emphasized that the ICSC Chair only approves exceptional four-week R&R cycles which is outside the ICSC R&R framework. The six, eight, and twelve week R&R cycle designations are handled by the UN Field Group and are governed by the ICSC R&R framework as approved by the General Assembly. Additionally, he explained that the designation of R&R destinations, as raised in the case of Tindouf and Haiti, is determined at the agency level, not by the Commission.

Mr. Pagan provided a detailed technical briefing on post adjustment methodologies. He described the dual survey system comprising comprehensive place-to-place and housing-only surveys and clarified that field duty stations typically undergo full surveys every three years, with additional annual or ad hoc surveys if economic shocks (like devaluations) occur or under certain circumstances (lack of reliable CPIs). He explained how cost-of-living indices are derived by comparison with New York, the

system's base reference point, and updated using both inflation and the evolution of the local currency.

Mr. Pagan also addressed a number of mission-specific concerns. Regarding Syria, he acknowledged that no post adjustment survey has been possible since 2012 due to conflict-related data limitations. Without reliable market access or staff expenditure data, Syria remains ineligible for a standard survey, though the ICSC is open to considering temporary proxy measures if the local UN coordinator and agencies request it.

In response to a question from Brindisi, Mr. Pagan clarified that the ICSC does not determine maximum reasonable rents (MRRs) under the rental subsidy scheme. MRRs were in certain cases managed in a concerted way by organizations at the duty station, but when that approach did not take place. MRRs are managed by individual agencies or the UN Secretariat. Nonetheless, he acknowledged staff concerns and directed representatives to consult directly with the responsible units managing these thresholds.

In the case of Abyei (UNISFA), he explained that due to the outbreak of the civil conflict and the evacuation of staff from Khartoum to Port Sudan and the lack of reliable inflation data, Sudan's post adjustment classification is temporarily linked to South Sudan. He also clarified the possibility of including UNISFA (Abyei) eligible staff members inputs to the cost-of-living survey but their contribution would not have much weight, similar to staff members in other locations like El Obeid or El Fashir, who have been excluded from previous housing averages due to incomparability with New York standards yet included in the general expenditure averages. There was also a mention of that the ICSC uses the duty station within the designated country with the highest CPI as a benchmark for comparison with New York to determine the PAI.

The case of Lebanon drew particular attention. Mr. Pagan acknowledged the unprecedented inflation and volatile currency situation, which had caused major fluctuations in post adjustment and led to the introduction of a Personal Transitional Allowance (PTA). He noted that the PTA is designed as a temporary measure and is phased out in accordance with ICSC guidelines. He also explained the rationale behind its adjustment schedule citing exchange rate corrections, salary scale updates, and post adjustment fluctuations as factors that potentially influence its exact duration, but recognized staff frustration over timing mismatches.

In response to a direct follow-up from the UNIFIL representative, Mr. Pagan defended the survey methodology used in Lebanon and noted that while inflation was indeed excessive, the local currency rate previously used (based on UN Operational Rates of Exchange, UNORE) had become artificially low, causing distortions. A Focus Group had recommended exploring the use of alternative exchange rates for future calculations when UNORE differed significantly from market rates.

The ICSC team acknowledged the growing challenges faced by staff in Haiti, particularly with respect to R&R costs, travel constraints, and rising inflation. Although the ICSC does not set R&R destinations or flight reimbursements, it noted that any adjustments to hardship or danger pay would require recommendations from UNDSS and formal requests from the field. Likewise, the issue of overtime eligibility for Field Service staff in non-family duty stations was deemed administrative in nature and outside ICSC's scope.

The UNGSC requested support from the ICSC to explore possible remedies for the classification of UNGSC-Brindisi and to consider its reclassification as an "A" duty

station. This request was based on the ICSC's guidelines for duty station classification, which assess factors such as health, security, and the availability of essential services.

Brindisi faces significant challenges in these areas. There is a notable absence of an accredited international school and a lack of adequate healthcare facilities, particularly in terms of specialized medical professionals and private hospitals. As a result, staff are often compelled to travel to Rome, Milan, or even return to their home countries to access necessary medical care. Additionally, the security situation in Brindisi raises concern. The city ranks 3rd nationally in homicides, and according to Numbeo (2024), it has a high crime index of 63.64, with 75% of residents expressing concern about property-related crimes.

In response, the ICSC informed UNGSC that Brindisi cannot be reclassified as an "A" duty station, as it is officially designated as a headquarters location.

MINURSO representative made a special request for the Tindouf duty station currently classified as "E" to have the R&R standardized with other "E: duty stations (D/S), changing its R&R cycle from 8 weeks to 6 weeks. This request was countered by the ICSC, that the Tindouf does not meet the conditions which could also qualify the D/S for Hazard Pay

On the topic of post adjustment survey eligibility, Mr. Pagan clarified that the inclusion of Field Service staff at the FS-5 level remains under review. The Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions (ACPAQ) had recommended their inclusion, but some organizations and staff federations had expressed concerns about spending pattern disparities. The ICSC plans to review historical data to determine whether FS-5 participation is statistically appropriate in future survey rounds.

Finally, Mr. Orlov closed the session by stressing the importance of staff understanding which issues fall under the ICSC's purview and which are handled by other UN entities. He expressed appreciation for the dialogue, emphasized the Commission's commitment to transparency and fairness, and encouraged continued engagement through formal channels.

UNFCU

The morning session began with an open exchange between field staff and representatives from the United Nations Federal Credit Union (UNFCU), focusing primarily on operational challenges and access to services from difficult duty stations.

Staff highlighted a recurring issue: the deactivation or cancellation of UNFCU cards while members were on mission travel. The concern revolved around staff being left stranded without access to funds. The UNFCU team acknowledged this and offered solutions, including expedited courier services for emergency card replacements and

the importance of using the UNFCU digital banking platform while traveling. Staff were encouraged to email the UNFCU directly for urgent support.

Further discussions touched on the UNFCU's withholding of final salary payments. UNFCU clarified that while they may delay disbursement pending loan settlements, there is a form UN Separation Update that can help waive the hold if pension payments are confirmed. However, as UNFCU is not integrated into the UN pension system like the UN Mutual, they cannot secure loans against pension funds. This structural difference, they explained, limits their flexibility.

Another representative from Syria raised concerns about the complete inoperability of UNFCU cards in Syria due to sanctions, and the extremely low \$4,000 cap on member-to-member transactions in the country. UNFCU responded that the cap was imposed due to past compliance issues, including large cash movements across borders, but that they would review it now that U.S. dollars are legally allowed in Syria.

A pressing topic involved loan repayments post-separation. UNFCU reiterated that loans must be repaid in full and that they reserve the right to recover what they can from final entitlements. However, in situations like UNAMI and MINUSMA, they acknowledged the human dimension and expressed openness to flexibility in reviewing payment terms especially if a staff member had found a new employment.

The conversation then pivoted to a hot-button issue for many European-based staff: the lack of mortgage offerings in Europe. Staff argued that there was a long-standing demand for this, especially in places like Brindisi and Geneva. UNFCU explained that offering secured mortgages in Europe would require costly banking licenses in each country, which the credit union cannot feasibly pursue. They cited prior unsuccessful attempts and currency exchange risks as reasons for discontinuation in Europe. Staff pushed back, stating that they were capable of managing currency risks and sought at least reconsideration of pilot options in places with high demand.

There was a call by the UNISFA representative for the UNFCU to expand key services to missions / offices across the African region, such services requested are increase in automated teller machines & teller services at the UNRSCE (Entebbe) and the UNON (Nairobi). There was also a call for a review of the UNFCU regulatory policies to reflect and/or benefit where a large group of its membership is based (across Africa).

The UNFCU advised they are continually looking to expand partnerships where they have a larger customer base. I.e. partnerships with financial institutions in Dakar, Senegal, partnership with regional financial institutions such as EcoBank. UNFCU agreed to take the matter back to their pricing and lending teams in New York for review and will communicate any changes to the FSU Executive.

The UNFCU also advised the Council that they had approval to make a \$3000 donation to the FSU Charitable account. The meeting concluded with appreciation from the Council for UNFCU's ongoing engagement.

Missions' specific issues

The meeting was convened with a singular agenda: addressing mission-specific issues. Acknowledging previous complaints about limited discussion time, the session was dedicated entirely to these matters, with a broader goal of exploring how the UN Field Staff Union (FSU) can enhance its relevance and connection with field personnel.

The representative from **UNFICYP** initiated the dialogue, highlighting two main issues: a lack of staff engagement evident in the absence of a national staff union and restricted conditions for spouses, even more difficult for those outside EU or western countries that remains to be addressed. Despite past efforts, including elections for union positions, no candidates came forward from the national staff. Furthermore, she deplores the fact that the issues considered a priority by some members of the mission, such as changing the category of duty station, overshadow other important issues for a mission like Cyprus, such as mobility and the well-being of spouses and dependents. Her concern centered on how to motivate staff and revive union interest in long-established, comfortable missions like Cyprus, where staff disengagement and complacency are entrenched.

In response, the FSU Executive emphasized their commitment to reviving dormant committees in places like Colombia, Cairo, Libya, Senegal, and others. They urged missions to share strategies for boosting staff union involvement and welfare engagement. For instance, BINUH representative shared how their welfare committee organizes events like happy hours and community outreach, funded through self-sustaining bar sales. This helped bridge the gap between staff and local authorities, improving the mission's public image and staff morale.

However, the representative from **UNFICYP** explained that Cyprus presents unique challenges. The mission is static, with little to no engagement even from local staff. The welfare committee is outdated, and the mission set up (two separate offices that do not interact) complicates engagement. Despite the presence of national contingents, international civilian staff remain disconnected. The discussion then shifted to mobility within missions, particularly internal staff rotation. The representative from **UNMISS** noted that despite expressions of interest and a past agreement for internal transfers, financial constraints have rendered implementation difficult. Staff have been in remote, challenging locations for years without reassignment, yet want the opportunity to move even within the same mission to maintain their mobility status.

It was acknowledged that while mobility was once easier under previous HR systems, the current structure imposes financial and policy limitations. Some mission leaders resist these moves, and despite global mobility frameworks, some staff who opted in were blocked by hiring managers. This lack of consistency has demoralized staff. Some suggested reinstating the mobility incentive for those unable to move due to managerial obstruction, arguing that it's unfair to penalize staff for circumstances beyond their control.

UNAMA's experience was shared as a positive example: they successfully implemented internal rotation by assessing staffing tables, budgets, and identifying staff in the same duty stations for over three years. Similarly, MINUSCA and other missions had initiated internal shifts through swap agreements, although concerns were raised about legality, favoritism, and inconsistency in implementation. There was also

concern about creating unofficial systems that could later be contested by staff or the Administration.

The Council debated the FSU's position on mobility: whether to push for internal mobility 'even without financial incentives or focus solely on advocating for global mobility policy improvements. Some warned that advocating unofficial systems could undermine the Union's credibility, while others stressed the importance of staff well-being over strict legal interpretations. The VP, Ms. Omondi, emphasized that the Council Members should be cognizant of the promulgation of the policy framework on mobility ref. ST/AI/2023/3, which overrides previous practices. [AI on Mobility, 24 August 2023 \(ST-AI-2023-3\).pdf](#)

A recurring point was that internal moves, if not transparently managed, could lead to accusations of favoritism. In MINUSCA and UNMIK, staff raised concerns over selective reassignment and lack of transparency. Furthermore, concerns were expressed about mobility's long-term future, especially in light of proposed UN compensation reforms that may eliminate incentives altogether.

The conversation also touched on the inherent disparity between field staff and those stationed at headquarters. Field staff often sacrifice personal and family life without the flexibility enjoyed by HQ staff yet are under scrutiny for receiving mobility-related benefits. Examples were shared of extreme personal sacrifices due to prolonged service in conflict zones used as a powerful narrative to defend field entitlements during ICSC meetings.

The discussion continued with mission-specific concerns from **MONUSCO** which shared that 49 international staff reassigned to Entebbe were given just 10 days to relocate, an insufficient timeframe especially as many were already displaced by conflict and stuck at the Rwanda-Congo border. He also noted the lack of a neutral party to mediate with armed groups like M23, who are now controlling Goma. The DSA chair in Goma feels powerless due to lack of engagement with M23.

Others questioned the legality of deploying staff in territories no longer under host government control, highlighting the absence of valid SOFAs (Status of Forces Agreements) with de facto authorities. Lessons from Cyprus and Ivory Coast were cited, where informal arrangements allowed for mission continuity in similar contexts, though not without legal ambiguity.

The administrative measures implemented to ensure the welfare and well-being of staff are duly recognized. [Administrative Guidelines for DRC Version 2.0.pdf](#)

There was agreement for these issues to be considered for discussion at the next Field Joint Negotiating Committee (FJNC), particularly regarding internal mobility, the threat of losing mobility incentives, and the safety of staff in volatile areas. Participants emphasized the need for clear, realistic policies and honest communication with headquarters to ensure staff voices are adequately represented.

The conversation moved to uncertainty around contracts, termination indemnities, job hunting, and unequal treatment of staff across missions. One speaker pointed out that those who have not yet experienced mission closure or job loss often fail to grasp the urgency until it happens to them. Slowly but inevitably, it would reach all missions.

Issues at UNODC and UNOV in Vienna where administrative and financial policy discussions were beginning to mirror those in missions already facing closure. Even if official documents had been drafted post-MINUSMA, they needed to be adapted and interpreted in ways that acknowledged the humanity of the staff affected. The

representative from UNFICYP emphasized that this was the responsibility of the Administration not the staff reps who should not be left to shoulder the stress and emotional toll alone.

She cited a troubling pattern: highly qualified staff from closed missions such as an environmental officer from her team weren't even receiving acknowledgments when applying for new posts. This, she argued, was not merely bureaucratic inertia but a systemic disregard for loyal staff being discarded at the end of their assignments. There is an allergy to these profiles she warned. And it should not be that way.

A newly appointed representative echoed with the importance of this opportunity, emphasizing the need to speak openly, especially since the issues raised would be read not only by fellow Council members, but also by Headquarters and the ICSC. She admitted she was still learning the process but expressed gratitude for the platform and solidarity.

Another speaker acknowledged VP, Ms. Omondi's earlier insistence on adhering to policy frameworks.

With mounting financial crises, the UN needed to be more adaptive, we can't just sit and wait for things to happen. She called for joint action by missions and the FSU in communicating with Headquarters. If we wait for the FSU to send something and they wait for us, it'll be December already and the opportunity will have passed.

The conversation then turned into one of the day's most contentious issues: termination indemnities. The representative from **UNAMI** spoke about the absence of enhanced termination packages for their staff, despite clear precedents in missions like UNAMA. VP Smith cited the example of three international staff from Kuwait, Syria, and Afghanistan who had separated on Agreed Termination within weeks of each other yet received drastically different packages: one received the maximum enhancement, another 25% enhancement, and the third just the basic termination indemnity depending not on years of service or hardship endured, but on which mission posts there were sitting on and the financial resources of that mission.

Another Council member confirmed that UNAMI's case had been raised again with the controller just the week prior. The President had brought it up during multiple meetings, including with IASMN and at the SMC. While staff might not always receive immediate feedback, "We take every opportunity to bring up UNAMI" he assured.

The **UNISFA** representative focused on four main issues: post adjustment discrepancies, unclear timelines for roster exercises, staff eligibility during R&R in non-family duty stations, and compensation concerns for Palestinian staff.

He flagged the confusion surrounding overtime compensation and R&R for staff in non-family duty stations, citing unclear guidance across the ST/AI and ST/SGB2023/1 documents. He expressed concerns on the lack of an official policy basis for denying overtime compensation to FS staff in R&R duty station and raised concerns about equity and transparency in the application of the UN compensation policies, that are key to help maintain fairness across different duty station. He requested one-on-one follow-up with Jacqueline, the policy expert, due to the technical nature of the issue.

He also informed that council on the case involving two Palestinian staff members in UNISFA who lost personal property due to conflict and were requesting financial compensation from the organization. The staff members had channeled their request to the UNISFA leadership but got an unfavorable response. They thereafter requested the UNISFA FSU committee and the UNFSU intervention, where possible. The

UNFSU President informed the UNISFA FSU chairperson that he is aware of this case and was copied on some communications between the staff members and the UNISFA leadership and that there isn't much the UNFSU can do to counter the decision of the mission.

The VP, Ms. Omondi, recalled that the previous FSU Executive(s), with the approval of the Council Members, provided donations of USD 10,000 to the International Red Cross for Sudan support and other donations for the Turkey earthquake, among other causes. However, they did not provide donations to individuals.

[UNFSU ICRC Donation Sudan.pdf](#);

[UNHCR UNFSU - Thank you SPsigned.pdf](#)

[WFP ThankYou Note UNFSU Donation.pdf](#)

The representative also highlighted the ambiguity of staff residency rights for personnel assigned to Somalia but living in Nairobi, or Entebbe-based international staff working in the region. This became a segue into a broader discussion on duty station classification and access to diplomatic privileges and immunities. The representative added that Uganda had begun allocating residence permits for UN staff dependents residing in-country, opening the possibility for staff members from neighboring missions to benefit from such privileges (resident permit), including their eligible family members. The Executive clarified that this was a country-specific administrative process not a global policy and had to be pursued through one-on-one agreements.

The Residency and Privileges issue was closely tied to operational costs and host government cooperation. The Ugandan government was highlighted as a positive example, having shown willingness to extend immunities to more UN personnel and their dependents provided a formal process is followed. This kind of bilateral arrangement was seen as the most feasible path forward, with UN missions expected to approach host governments directly rather than relying on global policy changes.

The residency status given to International Staff in Somalia by Kenya is a bilateral agreement between UNSOS and the Kenyan Government because first UNSOS has an office in Nairobi and second because the staff in the mission's office in Somalia are locked down at the airport.

The representative from **MINURSO** expressed concerns about the current struggles most staff are having when returning to the D/S. That regardless of such staff being in possession of a letter of "To Whom It May Concern" which confirms the holder is a legitimate worker of MINURSO, the use of UNLP without visible Visa causes humiliating delays to board flight heading to Morocco as the entry number normally written in the UNLP is not recognized by the airline. This often causes staff a delayed or rerouted flights, even though the UNLP is practically recognized within Morocco, it does not reflect that in the aviation portals, This is true for staff not carrying European or USA passports as an alternate entry means.

While MINURSO is technically a D-level family duty station, staff face Multiple-Entry visa issues making it difficult for dependents to move in and out of the D/S. .

Despite holding valid UNLPs and documents from HR or TTS, they are often stopped and interrogated. Sometimes they are delayed or denied boarding by check-In agents, ignoring the TTS 2006 agreement recognizing UNLPs by the destination countries. It

is vital for the TTS agreements by member states to be renewed and updated in the online aviation portals for ease of reference.

The FSU acknowledged the geopolitical sensitivity of Western Sahara and emphasized that visa-related issues fall under legal affairs and protocol offices, not staff reps. Still, the Council committed to raising the matter through formal channels.

UNIFIL, this segment delivered one of the most intense and urgent testimonies. The representative described a mission caught between political and economic paralysis, hostile terrain, and often facing conflicting administrative and security decisions deriving from two DO in Lebanon.

UNIFIL representative highlighted that the mandate is geographically restricted to southern Lebanon, an area under the de facto control of Hezbollah, with limited Lebanese government authority. As the Israel and Hezbollah conflict started in October 2023, and then significantly escalated in September 2024, UNIFIL civilian staff and their dependents faced relocation, then security evacuation, amid movement restrictions, uncertainties surrounding the conflict and inadequate logistical and security capabilities in place for staff protection.

During emergency evacuation efforts in September 2024, there were no confident arrangements, preparedness or capability for evacuation of civilian staff directly from South Lebanon. Military assets were not deployed for staff evacuation purposes and helicopters could not operate under the cross-fire. In September 2024, many staff and families were left on their own forced to coordinate their own exits to Beirut and consequent travel outside Lebanon, with limited evacuations means organized not by UNIFIL but by ESCWA primarily for their own and AFP staff

UNIFIL also suffers from fragmented authority, with two designated officials (north and south of the Litani River) issuing conflicting security and administrative orders. Staff relocated to Beirut fell under a different security jurisdiction, which lacked the resources and coordination to handle the mission's scale, as well as the guidance issued to UNIFIL staff in Beirut seemed to lack coordination between the two DO in Lebanon

The representative stressed that despite the realities on the ground, staff entitlements, safety, and employment rights cannot be suspended. She urged the FSU to remain firm in defending UN rules, even in crisis. *We are not asking for more" we are asking for what is due"* she stated.

However, the administrative measures implemented to ensure the welfare and well-being of staff are duly recognized. The guidelines often became the subject of a dispute between staff and the mission management, as they appeared to be in contradiction with the UN rules and regulations. [Administrative Guidelines for Lebanon Version 9 final.pdf](#).

The broader discussion underscored the unique legal statuses of regional hubs like RSC Entebbe and UNON Nairobi, where staffing and diplomatic privileges depend heavily on country-level agreements. The need for clearer guidance and harmonized practices was raised, especially when staff members have dependents living in third countries due to instability or education needs. There was a call for the UNFSU President to engage the head of entities (UNON and UNRSCE) on the possibility of engaging the host nations (the Governments of the Republic of Kenya & Uganda) to extending these privileges & residence permit to staff members (and the eligible dependents) in

regional mission (e.g. UNMISS, MONUSCO, UNISFA, etc.) desirous of maintaining and/or acquiring such status.

UNMVC, In the context of internal communications and broadcast rights, UNVMC has provided comments regarding the situation raised by Michael. At UNVMC, staff representatives are granted the right to send broadcast emails to all personnel and are fully authorized to convene town hall meetings with staff as frequently as deemed necessary. This approach ensures open and transparent communication between staff representatives and mission personnel, supporting a collaborative and inclusive work environment. This sparked a broader reflection on the freedom of communication for staff representatives, with many agreeing that such practices were unacceptable and undermined the function of the union. Several other missions admitted to having similar restrictions. The FSU committed to addressing these cases directly with relevant missions and reminded all staff that international broadcast rights are essential and non-negotiable for functioning staff representation. [ST.SGB.274 - Staff Management Consultation.pdf](#)

UNSOS/UNTMIS representative elaborated on concerns he raised during the VTC with OHR, namely, 1) The recent “unlawful” HR broadcast banning the combination of telecommuting on FWA from outside the duty station with R&R and more generally the unfairness of the FWA policy for field staff in non-family duty stations and 2) The non-abidance by the rules and policies on retroactive recoveries from overpaid staff members.

He explained that neither the policy on FWA nor on R&R stipulates that R&R cannot be combined with telecommuting from outside the duty station. Therefore, the HR broadcasts banning such a combination which have recently been circulated in some missions, including in Somalia, represent an unlawful administrative decision and should be retracted. The use of HR advice, HR broadcasts and guidelines as instruments to introduce new elements which are, in some cases, not in line with the duly promulgated policies have increasingly become common practice by DOS and OHR lately. This practice circumvents the due process of staff management consultation and contravenes with the policy on administrative issuances.

He additionally warned that with the discussions around FWA mounting in both the ICSC and the SMC, the FSU needs to timely highlight the unfairness imposed by the FWA policy as it is for the staff in the field, especially in non-family duty stations compared to their counterpart in HQ. For the staff in HQ, any of the four modalities of FWA offered would be practically usable for work-life balance. Whereas for the field staff in non-family duty stations who are confined in a camp of offices and accommodation, the only practical modality of FWA which can be usable for work-life balance is telecommuting from outside the duty station. He stated that for example staff in Mogadishu live under constant lockdown, with an extremely restricted perimeter for secured movement. Movements outside the secured area for official business are carried out in armored vehicles and military escorts. With that in mind, the modality of telecommuting from outside the duty station must be regarded in the case of field staff as a standard rather than an exceptional measure and be as easily acceptable to grant to field staff as any of the first three modalities for staff in HQ.

He highlighted that telecommuting from outside the duty station under FWA would also contribute to costs efficiencies (such as reducing costs of R&R travel lumpsum, danger pay, utilities costs) and to a lighter footprint in those times of heightened in security

risks, benefiting both staff in terms of mental health and the organization in terms of costs.

The **UNIFSA** representative focused on staff recognition and the practicalities of honoring service in the context of ongoing downsizing and mission transitions.

A key concern was the Long Service Awards and retirement certificates, which many staff saw as both a morale booster and a driver for FSU membership. While medals are more costly and limited to long-serving due-paying members, certificates could be printed more broadly, especially during a time when many missions are closing or reducing personnel. There was a call to have the long service certificates be extended to all UNFSU members and recently enrolled due paying members, and the medals be limited to due paying members only.

The Executive shared that a consultant had been hired to help fast-track the project, and an updated template would be made available to Mission Committees for use in their missions. This was seen not as a financial transaction, but as a way to rebuild a culture of collective union ownership.

Some missions have already taken creative approaches, producing end-of-mission appreciation plaques using personal funds. The consensus was that there should be a standardized approach to recognition, one that allows Mission FSU Committees to recognize their departing colleagues in a uniform and meaningful way.

UNAMA representative shared a proposal from UNAMA staff suggesting that a portion of staff union dues be voluntarily allocated to the UN Peacebuilding Fund, as a symbolic gesture of staff solidarity with the UN's mission and values during a time of erosion in multilateralism.

UNGSC, the discussion around Brindisi sparked an intense and prolonged exchange focused on the closure of the QSI School which serves many UN families in southern Italy. Staff were blindsided by the announcement that the QSI International School would close after the 2025 academic year, leaving dozens of international families scrambling.

While UNHQ had approved boarding assistance for staff whose children would need to attend schools away from Brindisi, this assistance was limited to schools within Italy excluding those who needed to send their children abroad or to their home countries.

Single parents faced devastating choices: relocating without job security, separate from their children, or enrolling their kids in unsuitable local schools. Legal and financial limitations around the UN's education grant policy were raised, but staff countered that the organization was interpreting regulations too narrowly. Specific sections of the ST/AI on the education grant were cited to argue that the restriction to within Italy was likely a misinterpretation. [ST/AI.2018.1.Rev.1](#)

Several delegates, including the FSU leadership, committed to revisiting the matter with UNHQ and the ICSC, emphasizing the moral and operational contradictions of splitting families while promoting family duty stations. There was a proposal to advocate for exceptions to be expanded, a position paper to be submitted, and further lobbying in upcoming ICSC meetings in New York.

UNIFIL representative outlined three major concerns. First, the issue of dual designated officials within Lebanon one in Beirut and one in Naqoura was creating

administrative confusion and policy contradictions, especially on issues like evacuation arrangements, allowances and risk classification. Second, the abrupt and rigid evacuation procedures forced staff to make heart-wrenching decisions with just a few days' notice. One staff member, a Syrian national, had to send his family to Latakia only for the area to be bombed days later. Others, especially those from conflict-affected countries, had no safe haven to turn to.

The rep argued that the organization lacked compassionate infrastructure for such situations. Unlike national armies, which accommodate families in hardship posts through specialized headquarters, the UN offered no alternatives, no interim duty stations, no family relocation support, and no mental health measures.

A proposal was raised to create a mechanism for temporarily relocating vulnerable families to regional hubs like Brindisi or Valencia during crises. The room responded with empathy, and it was agreed the issue merited further exploration.

BINUH representative shared a grave situation: the mission had lost all medevac capacity. With the closure of Haiti's border with the Dominican Republic and the expiry of their private medevac contract, staff were left with zero means of medical evacuation. WFP/UNHAS flights, while available, were not guaranteed and had limited prioritization for BINUH staff.

A staff member had recently requested an emergency evacuation, which was only possible via a temporary contract with a private company, Helidosa. This contract expired on February 28, 2025, and had not been renewed.

The representative asked whether this level of risk exposure was legally acceptable, particularly as the lack of medevac directly endangered staff lives. The Council agreed it was unacceptable and called for urgent action, highlighting those similar failures in Guinea-Bissau had nearly resulted in tragedy.

Concerns included:

Mental health deterioration due to isolation, lack of social infrastructure, and safety fears.

Ms. Omondi, the Vice President, emphasized her role as a UNISERV Focal Point and a member of the Mental Health Strategy Implementation Board. She also emphasized the significant milestones that the board has achieved, such as the adoption of best practices from other UN Common Systems, the use of scorecards to measure output, and her participation in a Working Group on the Insurance and Family Support Program.

A variety of organization-specific and inter-agency efforts have been made to address psychosocial well-being and mental health in the United Nations workplace. Reference to [workplace mental health and well-being in the UN system](#) for more information.

- [Factsheet 1: Why is Mental Health and Well-being Important?](#)
- [Factsheet 2: How Can You Improve Mental Health and Well-being?](#)
- [Factsheet 3: Thriving as Manager and Leader](#)
- [Online Training](#)

R&R policies being rigidly interpreted despite high-stress conditions, limited staff rotations, and restricted travel options.

UNVMC representative provided updates on operational challenges rooted not just in physical security, but also in systemic inconsistencies and neglect in supporting staff working in remote and often dangerous areas. The representative focused on several major concerns:

- Delayed internal mobility: Many staff members in non-family, high-risk zones (e.g., Caqueta, Choco, Guaviare) are effectively stuck for years without realistic prospects for reassignment or rotation, especially for those in the General Service and National Officer categories.
- Security threats to national staff: UNVMC national personnel have become direct targets of threats from armed groups, particularly when traveling in official UN vehicles or wearing identification. Despite this, protective measures remained limited.
- Insufficient medical support: The remote locations and weak healthcare infrastructure in many field offices leave staff vulnerable in emergencies. Some areas do not have reliable access to functioning clinics or medevac services.

A poignant example was shared of a colleague who suffered a serious injury in a remote location and had to wait hours for assistance due to helicopter availability and security clearances. There was widespread concern that national staff are disproportionately exposed to risk without adequate recognition or support.

They called for the development of a more flexible and responsive human resource and operational model that recognizes the reality of prolonged field presence under difficult circumstances. The speaker emphasized that UNVMC is no longer a short-term mission and should no longer be treated as such in planning and resource allocation.

The representative from UNFICYP expressed growing frustration over persistent administrative blind spots stemming from the mission's classification as a headquarters (HQ) duty station. Staff in Cyprus, they argued, are often excluded from the protections and benefits accorded to field staff despite facing field-like constraints and challenges.

Particularly pressing were issues related to:

- Healthcare access: Although Cyprus boasts a well-developed national health system, many UNFICYP staff reported dissatisfaction with the medical protocols in place, especially the slow responsiveness and bureaucracy in authorizing specialized care or medevac. In some cases, staff have resorted to taking annual leave to receive timely treatment abroad.
- Misalignment with HQ status: Several staff voiced concerns that Cyprus was misclassified. Staff called for a reevaluation of the duty station classification, suggesting it no longer reflects operational and contextual realities.

There was acknowledgment of recent efforts to improve local conditions, but overall, the tone was one of fatigue and a desire for real, structural change not just symbolic gestures.

UNMISS representative stated how being in a location of hardship for long periods of time can and has taken a toll on some staff members.

Despite their grievances, UNMISS staff also highlighted their resilience and commitment. We remain here because we believe in the work the representative said.

And would like to see harsh locations like Bentiu be on a four-week RR cycle although the likelihood of that occurring isn't likely as a guest speaker stated.

MINURSO representative affirms the FSU Committee's good relationship with the mission leadership and its constituency. The FSU Committee is looking forward to cooperation on the pending staffing review.

The staff representative from **UNMIK**, opened by raising concerns over the upcoming civilian staffing review (CSR) which raises significant concerns regarding its implementation, underscoring the necessity for a fair and transparent process in accordance with United Nations rules and regulations. It is essential that all stakeholders are engaged transparently to foster trust and collaboration.

Additionally, the modalities concerning flexible work arrangements (FWAs), as proposed by the Secretary-General, must be applied uniformly across all missions to ensure equity and harmony among staff. Consistent application of these policies will not only enhance morale but also optimize the operational efficiency of the UN's diverse initiatives worldwide.

Additionally, the representative highlighted the extreme environmental risks posed by the Obelie power plant, which continues to be a significant source of toxic pollution, an issue with direct implications for staff health. They requested a review to determine whether the conditions could qualify the mission for danger pay or at least merit a reassessment of hardship classification and local entitlements.

The representative concluded by urging the Field Staff Union and ICSC to take UNMIK staff's concerns seriously and to ensure that both mobility policies and local working conditions are addressed in a fair and inclusive manner.

The representative from **Entebbe** raised two significant matters.

The first point concerned the continued lack of engagement from the Resident Coordinator's office. Despite repeated attempts over three months to schedule a meeting to address several mission-specific concerns, the FSU had yet to receive a response. The representative recommended that the Executive reinforce the provisions of Secretary-General's Bulletin ST/SGB/274 (1994), which outlines the terms of reference and framework for cooperation between management and staff unions. A draft email to be sent on behalf of the Executive was prepared and shared on the Council WhatsApp group. The Council acknowledged this and agreed to work collectively on finalizing a position paper, attaching the SGB to reinforce the legitimacy of their appeal. The goal is to promote a culture of accountability and ensure management understands and upholds its responsibility to meaningfully engage with the staff union. The second concern related to the administration's handling of Residential Security Measures (RSM), particularly the reimbursement mechanism for related costs. In September 2024, UNDSS imposed new minimum operational security standards requiring all staff living in Uganda to ensure their residences include perimeter walls (with electric fencing or barbed wire), consistent perimeter lighting, and access to power backups such as generators or inverters. To support staff compliance with these costly requirements, a monthly flat allowance of \$400 was introduced to offset expenses including fuel, maintenance, and electricity.

Initially, the allowance was processed smoothly based on three documents: a completed UN form, an UNDSS compliance report, and a valid lease agreement. However, the Regional Service Centre (RSC) later added a requirement that staff submit monthly receipts for electricity and fuel expenditures. This posed considerable

challenges. Electricity is prepaid via the Yaka system and receipts are rarely available, particularly when bills are in landlords' names and payments are made through mobile money platforms. Furthermore, the RSC stipulated that receipts must reflect only perimeter lighting and generator fuel costs, which is both impractical and open to misinterpretation. Staff raised concerns that this may inadvertently incentivize falsified receipts. The representative noted that this issue has affected at least 53 staff members. In contrast, other UN offices in the same country, including the Resident Coordinator's Office in Kampala, continue to process the allowance as a lump sum without requiring receipts.

The representative from **MINUSCA** provided a detailed update highlighting both progress and persistent challenges within the mission. The mission is currently navigating an uncertain phase as discussions around its exit strategy have begun. Approximately 75% to 85% of the mandate has been completed, and it is anticipated that during the October renewal period, the Security Council may approve an official exit strategy. National elections are scheduled for December 2025, with the possibility that the mission could begin drawing down shortly thereafter.

Staff-management relations have significantly improved in recent months. Regular, structured meetings have been instituted, with the SRSG meeting biannually, the Chief of Staff tri annually, the Director of Mission Support quarterly, and the Chief of Human Resources monthly. A new process was also introduced whereby staff issues are documented and sent to the DMS office. Written responses are provided with deadlines for resolution, helping to ensure better accountability.

However, critical concerns remain most notably related to the Level 2 Serbian-run hospital in Bangui. Staff members reported life-threatening delays due to excessive administrative requirements, such as lengthy waiver forms that must be completed prior to receiving treatment. Staff have urged management to simplify the process and prioritize emergency care. Despite a commitment to resolve the issue by March 31, the situation has persisted, and frustrations remain high. Compounding the problem, outstations lack sufficient medical staff, with some locations having only a single nurse and no backup coverage. There are also serious concerns about the lack of basic emergency supplies, such as antivenom, in regional areas.

Accommodation standards in field locations have been another source of concern. Staff previously faced substandard living conditions based on their functional titles. This resulted in situations where lower-level staff were given accommodation with poor access to bathrooms or lacking basic amenities. Following advocacy, a uniform accommodation standard has been adopted across all field locations to ensure equitable treatment and dignity for all personnel.

The staff union has asked for clarification on MINUSCA HR core functions as it relates to the nature of support provided to staff. Due to escalating concerns raised by the staff regarding the responsiveness and nature of support provided by HR, HR and the staff union have organized a monthly meeting to discuss and resolve staff issues and concerns. A long-overdue Long Service Award ceremony for three years has finally been scheduled pending the availability of the SRSG.

Vehicle allocation and transport conditions were identified as major issues. The mission's vehicle-to-staff ratio stands at 4:1, yet access to vehicles is inequitable. Higher-ranking staff monopolize the use of vehicles assigned to sections, while others are left relying on dilapidated, unsafe buses with no air conditioning or functioning doors. Dusty conditions in Bangui exacerbate the discomfort, and efforts to replace

these buses have been delayed. Although the SRSB intervened to address the issue, vehicle distribution remains unresolved, particularly for staff at lower levels.

In response to ongoing concerns, a new Vehicle Establishment Committee has been created, composed of senior mission leadership. This committee is now tasked with improving transparency, ensuring compliance with New York-issued vehicle allocation ratios, and holding section chiefs accountable for hoarding or unfairly distributing vehicles. The committee also aims to address requests for weekend and liberty transport, which had previously been denied.

In conclusion, MINUSCA is making strides in improving staff relations and addressing welfare concerns but remains confronted with systemic issues in transport, medical care, and HR responsiveness. The mission is also seeking to leave a positive legacy by collaborating with the National Staff Association on projects that benefit local communities, such as hospitals, schools, or support initiatives for orphaned children.

Subsequently, the representative from **UNDOF** delivered a concise but important intervention, highlighting growing uncertainty surrounding the mission's future. Due to recent Israeli Defense Forces incursions into the area of separation and ongoing geopolitical tensions, there are widespread concerns among both international and national staff regarding the fate of the mission. While the USG Ladsous recently visited and assured staff that the mission would remain active, the mandate is only valid until June 2025, and no clear plan exists beyond that date. Given that the mission's military observers are unable to perform patrols due to the presence of Israeli forces, staff members are left in a state of limbo and concern.

A second pressing issue involves the legal and administrative complexities surrounding entry and exit into Syria. Previously, UNDOF staff relied on special entry passes issued by the Senior Syrian Arab Delegation, but these are no longer being provided under the new regime. Currently, staff are granted a 15-day entry stamp upon arrival, and there is no clarity about re-entry permissions after departure. Unlike other UN agencies that receive standard visas, UNDOF personnel have not been granted similar arrangements. The Head of Mission has been asked to formally engage the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to resolve this discrepancy, but progress remains stalled.

Final Reflections

As the mission-specific briefings wrapped up, the mood in the room was one of solidarity but also urgency. There was a shared understanding that while contexts vary greatly, the core issues dignity, safety, equity, and respect are universal across missions.

The Council reaffirmed its commitment to continue advocating for every voice heard during the meeting. With structural change often slow-moving, representatives encouraged one another to keep pushing, keep documenting, and above all keep each other informed and united.

Visa, UNLP, Diplomatic Status, and HR-Related Issues

During the Council session, the staff representative from the mission in Colombia raised several critical concerns regarding the status of privileges and immunities for

international staff, as well as long-standing issues around the issuance of United Nations Laissez-Passer (UNLP) documents and the cooperation (or lack thereof) from Human Resources (HR).

A key issue involved the interpretation of diplomatic status and the issuance of visas. Staff noted that privileges and immunities were inconsistently applied across grades, with P4 and below often being excluded from diplomatic status. While visas for senior-level staff (P5 and above) are generally processed as diplomatic visas, lower-grade staff are issued service visas on their national passports resulting in complications upon entry, such as questioning at airports and delays due to the lack of identification tying them to the United Nations. Additionally, the absence of official Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) cards further complicates staff mobility and recognition by national authorities.

These inconsistencies have not only led to logistical and reputational issues but also sparked concerns over the unequal treatment of staff within the same mission. In Brindisi, for example, all staff, regardless of contract level are issued MOFA cards, contrasting sharply with the experience in Colombia.

Furthermore, the staff representative highlighted significant delays in UNLP issuance. In one case, a staff member has been waiting for seven years for their UNLP, despite having completed all formal application requirements. It was revealed that local HR had circumvented this need by systematically issuing service visas instead, an approach described as an “unwillingness to do the job properly”. Despite escalations to the Chief of Staff and SMC, the issue remains unresolved, with HR refusing to compile a list of affected staff or process their applications.

Several speakers linked these failures to systemic HR shortcomings, citing poor internal accountability and decision-making based on personal discretion. Similar patterns were observed in other missions, but Colombia’s situation appeared particularly concerning due to the persistent lack of responsiveness and support from the local HR team. The mission’s HR officers, identified by name during the discussion, were accused of blocking or failing to act on legitimate requests.

Participants proposed two potential courses of action: first, that the executive leadership escalate the matter to OHR in New York to ensure compliance with standard procedures; and second, as a more controversial measure, that individual staff members directly submit their UNLP applications to the visa office in New York. While this route is likely to provoke institutional resistance, it was seen by some as the only viable option in the face of HR inaction.

The issue of diplomatic status was not limited to Colombia, but its manifestation there was emblematic of broader failures in the system. Staff underscored that these privileges are foundational to the operational integrity of UN missions and warned against the erosion of international legal protections. The topic will be escalated during the president upcoming visit in New York.

An additional challenge relates to staff union representation. The current UNDOF Committees term has ended, but no new candidates have come forward to stand for election. Despite ongoing encouragement and outreach, interest among staff remains low, with many preferring to delegate issues to the union rather than assume leadership roles themselves. The Chairperson noted that although staff value FSU’s advocacy, there is a reluctance to take on the responsibility of representing others. As a result, the Chair is currently serving in an interim capacity.

He confirmed that he would be departing from UNDOF on April 15 to join UNIFIL and offered to assist the FSU Executive in identifying potential new leadership candidates within the mission before his departure. The Executive acknowledged the importance of maintaining active FSU representation in all missions and committed to following up with UNDOF leadership and potential candidates.

Finally, it was proposed that issues related to visa, privilege, and immunities, which appear to be affecting multiple missions be addressed collectively at the systemic level. The Executive was encouraged to compile these recurring concerns and raise them with the Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) in New York through the appropriate channels. This could help facilitate engagement with permanent missions and host governments and ensure a more coordinated UN-wide approach to diplomatic status and staff mobility challenges.

Vice President Paul Smith offered historical context regarding the lack of visa issuance in certain missions, due to long-standing geopolitical constraints and mistrust between host nations. The Council acknowledged this as a systemic concern and reiterated the need to address it at a higher level. While some mission representatives have sought solutions via Ministries of Foreign Affairs, results remain inconsistent. It was suggested that OLA (Office of Legal Affairs) could potentially engage through permanent missions in New York, but previous responses from senior leadership indicated limited willingness to intervene in matters considered local mission issues.

Several delegates noted that UNLPs (UN laissez-passer) are increasingly ineffective, particularly when airport staff or immigration systems do not recognize them, often deferring instead to national passports or outdated agreements. Council members called for renewed advocacy and stronger institutional response to these recurrent diplomatic access challenges.

Visibility Proposal

Vice President, Ms. Jackline Omondi gave a presentation on a notion mentioned to Council Members via email last year on strengthening Field Staff relations via Inter-Agency Games (IAG) underlining the Executive had contacted Missions Leadership in September 2024 asking for their support and buy-in with an aim to unite staff from the Field Peacekeeping Missions and Political Missions to improve relationships and networking outside of the workplace. Furthermore, underlined were diverse mission IAG support techniques and the necessity of harmonizing them throughout the Peacekeeping and Political Missions.

She explained more to the Council Members that after talking with the FSU Administrator, who believed the Executive could evaluate the strategy of visibility products and not IAG branded items, this perspective was considered.

Following the same line of reasoning, the Council Members voted in favor of refocusing visibility efforts on affordable, impactful items such as simple branded T-shirts or flasks, which will be distributed to all staff at no cost, following extensive deliberation.

Long Service Awards & Membership Incentives

The discussion broadened the topic of long service awards. Delegates stressed the emotional value staff place on these recognitions and called for strategic use of such initiatives to boost membership and visibility. It was agreed that FSU Committees could issue retirement certificates at their own initiative to all staff regardless of membership status, however, the UNFSU Long Service Medals and Certificates would be reserved for dues-paying members only.

Several speakers emphasized that increased transparency around dues usage and tangible membership benefits could drive enrollment more effectively than visibility items alone.

Final Motions and Topic Withdrawal

To address divergent views, **UNISFA** representative proposed three possible motions:

1. Proceed with producing the visibility items and distribute them freely.
2. Produce the items and sell them as revenue-generating merchandise.
3. Postpone the initiative for further deliberation.

However, after further debate and growing confusion regarding the specifics of the vote, the topic was ultimately withdrawn by the proponent to prevent further procedural delays and avoid premature decisions.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The President noted the importance of distinguishing between the visibility proposal and the long service award initiative, which remains part of the official budget. The Executive will provide Mission FSU Committees with the Certificate template in order to locally issue retirement certificates, while preserving the medals for contributing members only.

Constitutional Review, FSU Structural Challenges, and Closing Reflections

The Council reconvened to address two major agenda items: the constitutional review process and long-term challenges to the FSU Executive. The President opened the session by requesting a brief update on the MONUSCO position paper, with members asked to agree on a single draft. A short working session was proposed so the MONUSCO working group could consolidate the two existing versions into one.

Following this, the Council formally moved into the constitutional review. It was recalled that a proposal to review the Constitution had previously been shared by email, including arbitration recommendations suggesting revisions in specific areas. UNISFA representative initiated the discussion by expressing concern about the disproportionate power held by the Executive compared to the Council and the lack of defined limits or guardrails within the current Constitution. This imbalance, in his view, warranted serious consideration of a revision.

UNVMC representative clarified that although amendments to the Constitution must ultimately go to a referendum and may require Secretary-General clearance if electoral provisions are involved, the Council's immediate role was to determine whether a review should take place and to form a working group. Members agreed that the initial step was simply to determine the need for a review and begin the process.

A motion was raised and unanimously adopted to proceed with a constitutional review. A working group was formally established, comprising eight members, five from the Council and three from the constituency. The Council noted the inclusion of Mr. Riccardo Maia, a constitutional lawyer and long-time FSU member currently serving as Head of Political Affairs Officer in MONUSCO. His participation was seen as a valuable addition to ensuring the legal soundness of proposed changes. It was further agreed that an electoral expert would be included and former FSU President Mr. Stephen Towler would complete the Working Group team. The Working Group members are:

Mr. Dejan Stepanovic – Entebbe
Ms. Eva Annette – UNFICYP
Mr. Louis Blopai Caesar Jr. – MINUSCA
Mr. Jose Luis Abreau – BINUH
Mr. Mohammed Helal – UNSOS/UNTMIS
Mr. Ricardo Maia – MONUSCO
Mr. Steve Towler – FSU Treasurer
Mr. Joram Rukambe - UNMISS

The WG was tasked with identifying weaknesses, proposing amendments, and ensuring that any changes align with UN regulations, electoral procedures, and sound constitutional frameworks. Once the group finalizes a draft, it will be shared with the Council for review before being put to the wider staff constituency in a referendum.

Long Term Challenges to the FSU and Proposal for New Working Group

Following the constitutional review segment, the Council turned its attention to structural and strategic challenges faced by the FSU. UNISFA Chairperson reopened a proposal he had first introduced in 2022: exploring alternative locations for the FSU Secretariat headquarters, currently based in Brindisi. His concern was rooted in long-term sustainability, especially in light of potential disruptions, be they financial (UN liquidity crisis), logistical (school closures affecting families), or administrative (host government changes). UNFICYP representative stated that any review of the FSU challenges must ensure due consideration and job security of the FSU Admin & Finance Assistant, Ms. Rosa Colucci.

UNSOS/UNTMIS representative broadened the discussion, suggesting that the issue of FSU headquarters was in his opinion one of the challenges confronting the Union. He suggested there were structural weaknesses: the lack of a middle-management layer between the executive and Council members; geographical dispersion; slow communication channels; and institutional asymmetries when dealing with the UN administration. He called for a comprehensive assessment of the Union's internal structure and strategy, not limited to headquarters location.

After further input from members a second working group was proposed and agreed upon. This group would not only explore long-term challenges but also conduct a holistic review of the FSU's structure, operations, and risk mitigation strategies with the priority focus being institutional strengthening and strategic foresight.

The Council agreed that this Working Group would not overlap or duplicate the efforts of the constitutional review WG. The Working Group members are:

Ms. Asenasa Colawai – UNAMA
Mr. S. Michael Blamo II – UNISFA
Ms. Nino Pollock – UNIFIL
Mr. Mohammed Helel – UNSOS-UNTMIS
Mr. Jairo Fernandez Duarte – UNVMC
Ms. Ingrid-Ranah YOUNES EI AZZI – UNGSC

Internal Justice System Concerns

UNFICYP representative raised a critical issue regarding the erosion of staff rights within the UN internal justice system. She briefed the Council on recent changes, particularly a General Assembly-approved reform that limits the ability of UN judges to question evidence presented by the administration. This effectively forces judges to accept investigation findings without challenge unless counterevidence is presented by the staff members, creating an imbalance in proceedings.

She warned that these developments, coupled with weak whistleblower protections and the limited capacity of OSLA, undermine due process and staff protection. Several members echoed her concerns, emphasizing the systemic nature of the problem. UNSOS/UNTMIS representative added that OSLA's operational conflict of interest due to its dependence on OLA for employment opportunities was a serious flaw in the

system. The Council agreed to remain vigilant and support the Justice Working Group in tracking and responding to these trends.

Appreciation Initiatives and Plaques for Council Members

Building on earlier discussions around long-service certificates and visibility efforts, a proposal was made to formally recognize FSU Council and Committee members at the end of their service. The initiative would include personalized plaques to honor their contribution. The motion was unanimously adopted, with agreement that this would reinforce institutional memory, boost morale, and help members feel appreciated for their volunteer service.

Final Business and Concluding Remarks

The Council finalized decisions regarding the distribution of the MONUSCO resolution paper, which would be addressed to USG Lacroix and copied to UNDSS, in line with past practice. Elections were discussed, with preparations to begin in August to allow sufficient time before the October turnover.

The session closed with a heartfelt address from the President Milan Dawoh, who reflected on the sacrifices made by members of the executive and Council. He emphasized that the Union's growth, integrity, and effectiveness relied on unity, purpose, and genuine commitment. Under the current leadership, the FSU is the only growing union in the UN system, and the executive pledged to continue working with humility and fiscal responsibility. Members were encouraged to support upcoming initiatives, including the membership campaign linked to the long-service certificates.

The meeting concluded with gratitude expressed to the Executive, the Secretariat staff, and all Council members for their hard work, dedication, and camaraderie. A short break followed, with final logistical discussions wrapping up the 2025 Council session.

Final Session: Visibility Items, Budget Review, and Strategic Financial Planning

The final sessions of the Council focused on three major areas: finalizing the visibility item decision, presenting and adopting the financial report and budget, and initiating longer-term strategic planning discussions.

Visibility Items for Members

Following earlier proposals, the Council revisited the visibility item initiative, which had generated ongoing interest. The session clarified the distinction between long service awards already budgeted and reserved for due-paying members and additional memorabilia items such as caps, pens, t-shirts, and key rings. Three options were presented for a vote:

1. Produce and sell visibility items for income generation.
2. Produce visibility items and distribute them to staff for free.

3. Postpone the initiative.

Option 2 was adopted by majority vote. The Council approved the production of modest items, such as pens or key rings, which would be distributed to staff members at no cost. This approach aims to boost morale and foster union visibility while avoiding high shipping costs and logistical challenges associated with bulkier items. The proposal was supported by several members as a gesture of appreciation toward the constituency, and a working group will determine the specifics.

UNFSU Treasurer Financial Report / Budget

The final day of the Field Staff Union Annual Council Meeting featured a comprehensive financial briefing and budget session led by the FSU treasurer. The presentation, delivered on March 7, offered a detailed overview of the Union's financial standing, investment strategy, and projected budget for the coming year. The session was interspersed with clarifying remarks, procedural votes, and interactive exchanges among Council members.

The treasurer began by referencing the financial report previously circulated to all Council members. A motion to accept the report for the financial year ending 31 December 2024 was passed, with Dejan Stepanovic from FSU-ENTEBBE proposing and Jose Abreu from FSU-BINUH seconding. The Council approved the report unanimously.

The treasurer then transitioned into a breakdown of current income trends. Membership contributions had increased significantly in 2024. While closures of some peacekeeping missions had initially caused a dip in contributions, the total number of contributing members rebounded to 1,470 by the end of the year.

He emphasized this positive trend, noting the importance of maintaining and growing the dues base. A request was raised to receive mission-by-mission breakdowns of dues payments to better tailor campaign outreach particularly in missions with low participation.

Current Assets & Investment Strategy

The Treasurer then detailed the Union's current assets as of 28 February 2025. The Treasurer updated the Council on the investments of Union funds in UNFCU Share Certificates, spread across 3-, 6-, and 9-month terms. The investment portfolio had generated equivalent to the annual dues of 175 members, reaffirming the importance of a sound income diversification strategy.

Budget Projections for 2025

The Treasurer then presented the projected budget for 2025, broken down by travel, engagement, and special project costs. The budget included allocations for key executive and Federation-level travel such as attendance at ICSC sessions, HR network meetings, inter-agency boards, and the Mental Health Strategy Implementation Board in Bonn.

A special USD 20,000 allocation was also requested to continue supporting the UNFSU Long Service Awards project, following discussions earlier that morning.

The total projected expenses for 2025 stood at USD 93,081, a figure significantly below the annual income, (including both contributions and interest income). Council members discussed the importance of considering the Council meeting travel expenses, which are covered separately through Umoja but historically cost around USD 70,000 - 80,000 after reimbursements.

A motion to approve the budget was proposed by the UNSOS representative and seconded by UNFICYP representative and passed unanimously.

Strategic Investments: Renewed Approval

With the previous investment mandate expiring, requested Council approval to continue investing surplus funds in UNFCU share certificates in collaboration with the FSU President. He explained that the current interest rate environment made short-term (e.g. 3-month) bonds unusually lucrative, but the FSU maintained a balanced portfolio to ensure both growth and liquidity.

Council members endorsed the request unanimously, allowing the Treasurer and President to proceed with further investments as liquidity permitted, while maintaining enough flexibility for emergency travel and operations.

Closing Remarks

The Treasurer concluded his presentation by reminding Council members of the growing influence of staff unions. Referencing remarks made by UNFCU representatives the previous day, he noted that most of the Union's membership is now based abroad opening avenues for stronger advocacy with the credit union for improved services and access outside the U.S., particularly in challenging duty stations like Haiti.

He also offered his personal support for future financial matters, reminding members that he would remain available until his retirement in June 2025. The session ended with thanks from the FSU President.

The Council unanimously voted to renew the Treasurer's authority in conjunction with the President to continue making prudent investments in secure share certificates for another 12-month period, always maintaining a reserve for operational flexibility and unforeseen travel requirements.

The Treasurer noted that the investment income alone in 2024 was equivalent to gaining an additional 175 contributing members, **Mission-Level Contributions and Targeted Campaigns**

Several members raised the importance of tailoring membership campaigns to improve dues collection. The Council requested a breakdown of dues by mission to better understand coverage and engagement levels. While the financial report includes aggregated income data, efforts are underway to incorporate detailed mission-level breakdowns in future reporting, which will support more targeted outreach efforts.

Strategic Engagement with UNFCU

Building on remarks from a UNFCU representative during the week, it was noted that a majority of UNFCU members now reside outside the United States. This shift presents a strategic opportunity for the FSU and other federations to advocate for expanded services, including ATM access and banking support in field locations. The Council agreed to consider this shift when engaging with UNFCU in future.

Closing Observations and Leadership Recognition

The Council expressed its deep appreciation for the Treasurer's rigorous management and clear presentation. Special thanks were extended to the Executive, whose

strategic restraint in travel and proactive investment of funds contributed significantly to the FSU's healthy financial standing.

An additional motion was approved to issue plaques to Council and Committee members at the conclusion of their mandates, as a formal expression of appreciation and institutional recognition.

Looking Ahead

The Council confirmed that the next FSU Council Meeting will tentatively be held in Brindisi, unless alternative proposals are submitted. The Executive reminded members that Council meetings are constitutionally mandated, and that sufficient advance planning would be required to manage costs.

The session concluded with a heartfelt message from the President, highlighting the personal sacrifices made by the Executive members in service of the union, the importance of legacy-building, and the growing strength of the UNFSU as the only union currently expanding its membership across the UN system.

Conclusion

The 2025 UNFSU Council Meeting marked a pivotal moment of reflection, reaffirmation, and renewal for the United Nations Field Staff Union and its membership. Against the backdrop of global mission closures, evolving peace operations, and tightening financial conditions, the Council convened with a clear sense of urgency and purpose.

The breadth of discussion from structural reforms and compensation policies to mission-specific hardships and systemic HR inconsistencies underscored both the complexity of the challenges faced and the unwavering commitment of field staff representatives to address them. Through robust dialogue with UN leadership bodies, such as OHR, ICSC, and UNISERV, the Union has continued to assert itself as a credible, solution-oriented advocate for staff welfare and dignity.

Crucially, the Council's achievements over the past year have translated into measurable progress. Membership numbers are climbing, financial strategies have yielded sustainable returns, and field personnel have been successfully supported through mission drawdowns and reassignments. The Union's advocacy has grown more sophisticated, data-driven, and inclusive.

At the same time, the Council acknowledged the work still to be done like improving internal mobility, ensuring equitable termination practices, strengthening mental health support, and restoring trust in internal justice mechanisms. The launch of two new working groups on constitutional reform and institutional restructuring demonstrates the Union's proactive posture and commitment to organizational integrity.

As field operations become more complex and staff demands continue to evolve, the Field Staff Union enters this new chapter with strengthened resolve. The Council's concluding message is clear: field staff are not alone. Their experiences, voices, and rights will continue to be defended with professionalism, solidarity, and accountability.

With renewed momentum and a shared vision, the Union remains steadfast in its mission to protect, to represent, and to build a just and empowered workplace for all field personnel across the UN system.