

75th session of the FICSA Council
Statement by Catherine Pollard - HLCM Chair
28 April 2022

- Dear colleagues and partners, greetings to you all.
- And thank you sincerely for inviting us to join this council meeting. We really appreciate the chance to discuss with you today and to speak, through the federation, with nearly 40,000 colleagues around the world. It's a rare opportunity, and as HLCM Chair I am pleased to avail of it.
- Last year, Kelly Clements, our HLCM Vice-Chair, was speaking with you about how exceptional the current times are within an unprecedented public health challenge. Who would have thought that one year later we are finding ourselves in even more protracted and challenging times that will require, more than ever, a collaborative, focused and values-based approach and collaboration between the administrations of the UN System organizations and its staff.
- The last two years of the Covid-19 pandemic have required a lot from all stakeholders, and we appreciate the tireless efforts of our UN teams throughout this exceptional moment in history. And while the pandemic is certainly not over yet, the war in Ukraine is serving as an additional stress test for the UN system's ability to respond and to manage resources – not only financial resources but also staff members with specific backgrounds and experiences in need. The long-term impact on human development from this combination of events is only starting to emerge, putting at risk decades of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Under these uniquely difficult circumstances, it is therefore incumbent upon us - as members of agencies and entities, as the High-Level Committee on

Management, and as representatives of our workforce - to continue to work to improve the system in which we work.

- The pandemic has changed how we work, and a number of these changes are here to stay, though certainly the evolution of the thinking about what this practically means is still in progress. The last FICSA Council was the first one to take place virtually, and this was a good choice under the circumstances. And it is as conducive to now, under evolving circumstances, provide for renewed in-person contact among colleagues that has been missing for a long time. In our work context, the future certainly lays somewhere in the middle, with increased hybrid and asynchronous work relationships.
- I am sure that you are all looking forward to changes from the current work modalities and to engage in more personal contact. But we also increasingly recognize that this new work environment isn't necessarily that much easier to manage and live than the fully virtual world we are coming from. We will have to further harvest emerging lessons about work-life balance in this new environment and be thoughtful and conscious when balancing the needs of the individual staff member and that of the organization. The quest to rethink how we do things, build back better and adapt to new situations is a permanent one, and it should be a joint effort having in mind that our people carry enormous strength, so they are first and foremost in our view.
- Colleagues, we are all well aware that, given the socio-economic impact of the pandemic, Member States will continue to be under immense pressure to drive their domestic recoveries. The much-needed response to the war in Ukraine has mobilized very significant support among key Member States but there may be a risk that this engagement comes at the expense of the resourcing of other global crisis situations. At the same time, Member States expect us to continue to deliver on our mandates, meet ever growing needs, and continue to provide them strong support. This will mean that our

efficiency and effectiveness as UN organizations will be under even more intense scrutiny in the years to come. The credit for succeeding so far in these efforts goes, above else, to the personnel of the UN system, for your commitment and dedication to our common cause. Thank you.

- I believe we have proven that we can and will find innovative solutions, drawing upon best practices and lessons identified, to enable us to continue to deliver around the world. Indeed, I would submit our collective response to the pandemic, especially on the business continuity side, which is a paramount example of just that. We see that the expanded experience in risk management, ensuring business continuity, digitalization of workflows and virtual modes of working provides us with better practical tools to provide support in crisis situations such as Beirut, Afghanistan or Ukraine. This also includes more explicit reflections on what functions need to be carried out where, not least in an effort to seek a lower risk exposure for staff while at the other hand avoiding an impression of not being sufficiently “on the ground”.
- HLCM’s role in all this is to enable greater effectiveness and efficiency while ensuring the well-being of our personnel. Its various mechanisms, from the Future of Work Taskforce and the Occupational Safety & Health Forum to the HR Network, the IASMN and the Medical Directors, have all worked very hard to coordinate and align policy frameworks to enable business continuity and crisis response; they have gone above and beyond the call of duty given exceptional challenges.
- Since last year, we have jointly taken considerable efforts to foster the vaccination campaigns. But those jabs alone will not undo the impact of the pandemic, certainly not on the people we serve, nor on our colleagues, amongst whom we are seeing more worrying signs of

mental health challenges, stress and burnout. The HR network and UN Medical Directors have been increasingly focused on the need for long-term psychosocial and wellbeing support, and I wish to explicitly acknowledge FICSA's contribution to those efforts.

- Colleagues, let me turn to the recent HLCM session, the first in-person meeting after the acute phase of the pandemic, and illustrate the key areas of work of HLCM in the coming months. The first one is the work of the inter-agency Taskforce on the "Future of Work for the UN Workforce. The objective of this Taskforce is a strategic reflection on how to be as efficient and effective as possible, and to attract and retain the best talent for the UN system to deliver for the people we serve.
- We have approached this process by reviewing the experience and expectations of HLCM member organizations and drawing on best practices from thought leaders outside the system. By now, a number of deliverables have been developed. Those concentrate mainly on the area of workplace and management culture, not least as enablers for staff engagement and mental health, including the Senior Leadership Commitments, a Flexible Work Model Policy and advanced drafts of documents on the "right to disconnect" and "work-life harmony". The finalization of the advanced drafts is foreseen in the coming months, and this will be done in collaboration with the staff federations. HLCM, of course, cannot mandate any of its members to implement such reference documents. We can make policy, inspire innovation, and promote improvement, but HLCM is not an enforcement body.
- Another part of the Taskforce's discussions was on a review of the contractual modalities, a topic that had caused a lot of debate last year. Our Vice-Chair Kelly Clemens had spoken to this at length at last year's FICSA Council. The reflections have been conducted in conjunction with the parallel ICSC Working Group on the contractual

framework. In these joint reflections we now seem to converge to a conclusion that the intended agility and flexibility (by the way for both staff members and organizations alike) will not so much be catered for by the specific contractual modality as such. Rather, we will continue those discussions in the framework of the upcoming ICSC comprehensive review of the compensation system which the UN General Assembly has requested to be conducted by 2026. I would welcome a constructive and open collaboration on these efforts, as we have seen during the last comprehensive review in 2014-2016.

- A third area of work of the Taskforce is probably not as prominent in the public perception yet, though it may have significant benefits and impacts: the piloting of the UN Digital ID. These efforts are now carried forward by a dedicated project team that is currently being formed. It is meant to provide a new platform to facilitate inter-agency cooperation and joint administration but also to enable and simplify inter-agency mobility for staff from an administrative perspective. With those three elements in mind, we are planning to conclude the work of the Taskforce in fall while continuing the relevant discussions in the project team (for the UN Digital ID), the HR Network and the ICSC context.
- Another focus of HLCM's work is the prevention of sexual harassment and racism. The CEB Task Force on Sexual Harassment was initiated in 2017 by the Secretary-General to instill a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, strengthen victim-centered prevention and response; and foster a safe, equal and inclusive working environment across the UN system. Since then, we have made substantial progress.
- We have some tools now in the system: a model policy, the Clear Check database that is increasingly used by the majority of UN entities, a guide for managers to prevent and respond to sexual harassment, a code of conduct for UN events, and a new Manual for investigations. We know from our data that sexual harassment

remains clearly a gender issue and one related to power differentials, and that in cases of sexual harassment, survivors at present strongly favor formal reporting over informal dispute resolution. And we know we need to strike the right combination of accountability and trust. On one hand, the majority of cases where an investigation has been substantiated, the allegations led to a disciplinary measure. On the other hand, we have acquired valuable lessons about the need for a coherent and consistent victim-centered approach.

- With this in mind, the next phase of the Taskforce will concentrate on two things: First, enhancing communication, to raise awareness with all personnel of the tools at their disposal to address sexual harassment, but also to induce a qualitative shift towards a more partnership-oriented approach between management and personnel. Second, a conscious effort of the Task Force to show a clear path for the UN system to ensure the sustainability of efforts to address sexual harassment.
- With regard to efforts addressing racism and discrimination, HLCM agreed to initiate a closer collaboration with experts on such issues and diversity in general, much alike the approach chosen for the initial stages of the work on addressing sexual harassment. Again, we invite FICSA to collaborate with us on this important topic.
- Colleagues, I hope this gives you a good impression of some of the key topics under consideration by HLCM. We are in the process of more granular work planning and will obviously include a range of other strategic and operational issues on our agenda. As mentioned in the beginning, the quest to rethink how we do things, build back better and adapt to new situations is a permanent one, and we will also reflect further on our own work modalities in order to better cater for supporting the UN System administrations in this increasingly volatile and unpredictable world. We as HLCM will continue to do so in seeking

good collaboration and exchange with FICSA and the other staff federations, and hope that we can continue that approach in a frank, objective and appreciative spirit – this is what I pledge from my side as HLCM Chair. I am open for any questions and feedback and look forward to our further collaboration.