

COMMUNICATIONS

FICSA letter to Executive Heads

25/20

- For distribution to all your members -

Geneva**27 March 2020**

To: All members

From: Evelyn Kortum, General Secretary

Dear colleagues,

Please find just below a letter sent today to all FICSA Executive Heads. Could you please share this message to all your members.

Geneva, 27 March 2020

Dear Executive Heads,

The Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) writes to you today out of both appreciation and concern.

The WHO recently announced that the COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating. It took 67 days from the first reported case to reach the first 100,000 cases, 11 days for the second 100,000 cases and only 4 days for the third 100,000 cases. This being said, the staff we represent remains hopeful that the stricter containment measures recently introduced in many countries will soon bring about the desired result of slowing down the spread of the virus. At the same time, as stated by WHO, aggressive and targeted tactics are also necessary to win the war against this virus.

In this respect, FICSA would like to express its appreciation for the steps taken by the UN common system organizations to reduce staff exposure to the potential viral threat as evidenced by the issuance of directives to staff that they work remotely where necessary and adhere to the instructions of the WHO and the local/federal authorities.

While many staff members, particularly in HQ duty stations and other areas experiencing a large COVID-19 impact, are currently working from home, this is not the case for all UN staff. We understand that a limited number of "essential" staff members will have to continue working in their offices to keep the organization's logistics and IT infrastructure

COMMUNICATIONS

up and running. Others will have to continue to work in high-risk areas in order to uphold the mandate of the organization. Others still will continue to work as normal until such time as the situation changes in their duty station. In light of such varied realities for our staff, FICSA strongly urges Executive Heads to ensure consistent application of best practices to uphold the general wellbeing and mental health of all UN staff.

Under the current crisis we must all recognize, however, that we cannot apply a “business as usual” approach. The more immediate priorities have changed. While staff are doing their utmost to ensure business continuity, to the extent possible, they are also feeling stress, anxiety and uncertainty in addition to taking care of their children and families. This situation can affect not only the physical health of staff but also their mental health. In this respect, FICSA appreciates that some organizations have been very flexible with their staff and have made wellness and psychosocial resources available to them.

Furthermore, we count on the organizations to ensure that managers and supervisors not just focus on the distribution of work to staff working remotely, but that they also frequently contact their staff to enquire about their health and wellbeing, to show genuine understanding and care.

Please know that you can count on the full support of the FICSA Executive Committee and our membership at large to work with our administration counterparts to support staff at this time. Most recently we have participated in a meeting of the Implementation Board for the UN Strategy on Mental Health and Wellbeing where we were glad to support efforts to ensure cohesive support to staff and provision of information related to safeguarding mental health and wellbeing. In addition, the three staff federations are working with the HR Network Chairs and the CEB Secretariat to continuously improve the conditions provided in the Administrative Guidelines for Offices on the COVID-19 outbreak.

In this spirit, we also encourage you to work further with the staff associations and unions in your respective organizations in order to adapt the Guidelines to the best prevailing practices in these extraordinary circumstances. In this regard, we are pleased to note some specific topics which FICSA would support being rolled-out across the system where possible: some organizations have provided clarification to the staff as to whether they remain covered by medical and accident insurances while working remotely, and we hope that all organizations will ensure such staff that service-incurred accidents or illness will be covered through the organizations’ respective insurance policies; some organizations have made it clear that staff members in a care-giving role (young children, elderly parents, sick dependents) have the option to request special leave with pay instead of using their accumulated leave days.

FICSA trusts that it can continue to count on the organizations’ commitment of its duty of care to its staff irrespective of where they may be working. Not knowing how long this

COMMUNICATIONS

situation may last, FICSA will continue to monitor developments and seek feedback from staff should it be necessary to convey specific staff concerns to the organizations as the crisis evolves.

Please accept the assurances of our highest consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Brett Fitzgerald
Acting President