COMMUNICATION 37/19

Status of the Mental Health Strategy

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To: Chairs, Member Associations/Unions   Geneva, 13 December 2019
        Members of the Executive Committee
        Chairs, Members with Associate Status
        Chairs, Associations with Consultative Status
        Presidents, Federations with Observer Status
        Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Standing Committees

From: Evelyn Kortum, General Secretary

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Dear Colleagues,

FICSA is dedicated to fostering change across the UN system which promotes a healthy workplace environment; physically, mentally and socially. In supporting its members, FICSA has represented your interests through the participation of the Co-Chair of the Standing Committee on Social Security and Occupational Health and Safety (SOCSEC/OHS) Tanya Quinn-Maguire, in the development in the UN System Workplace Strategy on Mental Health and Wellbeing, also referred to as the MH Strategy. We would like to update you on the status of the MH Strategy, which was launched in October 2018.

As previously reported to FICSA membership during recent FICSA Councils, one important finding from the **UN-System Survey on Mental Health in the Workplace (2015)**[i] was that poor mental health is associated with the number of years worked for the UN. This is clearly a worrying statistic. In addition, the 2015 Survey showed that mental health issues were as much an issue in headquarters as non-HQ duty stations. Furthermore, "statistically significant associations were found between perceived incivility/conflict at work and mental health issues", and the survey noted that "levels of perceived incivility/conflict at work were higher among those screening positive for..." mental health issues, including hazardous drinking[i]

In accordance with the agreement of several FICSA Councils, FICSA committed to support the implementation of the Mental Health Strategy across the UN System, and in particular within the FICSA membership. A Programme Board was established in October 2018, following the launch of the MH Strategy to oversee its implementation. FICSA is an active member of this Board. With this assistance, the program has been able to accomplish several tasks and initiate action plans.

Two of the initial priority actions have focused on the psychosocial support that is available to UN personnel. Recommendations have been made to ensure that there is equitable access to psychological support and that an appropriate Quality System is in place. These recommendations are currently being enacted. Action has also been taken to develop proposals to support UN organisations to address stigma related to mental health in the workplace. FICSA advocacy, in this regard, has been very much inspired by the approach of UNCARES in dealing with stigma related to staff living with HIV. In line with these actions and following advocacy from FICSA based on the UNCARES model, the Implementation Board created an Advisory Group consisting of staff who have experienced and live with a mental health condition. This Advisory Panel consists of personnel from across the UN and their input is sought to ensure that the voice

of affected staff is taken into account when developing measures to reduce stigma related to mental health in the workplace across the UN System.

Other objectives of the MH Strategy include developing proposals that UN-system organizations can use when implementing the Strategy in their organization. These proposals ensure that the managers and leaders of these organizations are equipped with the skills to undertake required action as part of a more holistic approach to ensuring a healthy working environment for staff.

Another major milestone this year was the launch of the website dedicated to supporting the implementation of the MH Strategy. Please refer to the email message sent to the FICSA membership on 10 October 2019 which provides links and details of how your organisation can start the process of implementing a Mental Health Strategy for your staff. The message also provides information about numerous tools and resources that your organisation can use in this regard.

Finally, in order to continue functioning as planned, resource generation has begun with a call for voluntary contributions to support the Strategy's mission. This call was sent to all heads of Human Resources in the UN System in September 2019.

In the coming months, the website will be consistently improved and updated to support all organisations in the implementation of a mental health strategy. In addition, a baseline survey will be developed and shared with UN organizations to assist them in assessing current attitudes towards mental health in their specific organization. This is a first step in beginning an implementation plan with organization-specific approaches to the MH Strategy. This will help to implement the Strategy in each organization both more effectively and efficiently, meanwhile, serving as a baseline standard for future surveys. The Implementation Board will hire a consultant to review existing training options for UN organizations with a review to recommending state of the art trainings that could support the implementation of the mental health strategy in individual organizations.

To learn more, please visit the **UN's healthy workforce website** which includes links to videos by the Secretary General and the **Deputy Secretary-General's on the importance of mental health**, as well as links to testimonies by various staff members, **i.e. Fabrizo Hochschild** on this topic which were screened during the launch of the MH Strategy in October 2019.

If you have any queries on how to implement a mental health strategy in your organisation, please do not hesitate to contact Tanya at quinnmaguiret@unaids.org, Therese Fitzpatrick at mhs@un.org, or the FICSA Secretariat at ficsa@un.org

In the next weeks, we will also send you a questionnaire asking about steps taken to implement a Mental Health Strategy in your organization which we will share during the FICSA Council in February 2020 as well as on the FICSA website as a resource for all of our members.

[i.] **Results from the UN System Survey on Mental Health in the Workplace**