



The official magazine of international civil servants
La revue officielle des fonctionnaires internationaux

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management
reforms go too far?

KEEPING PEACE INSIDE THE UN

Hany Abdel Aziz
on running
staff-management
consultations

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It took only a short amount of time for the COVID-19 pandemic to disrupt the world of work, as working from home became widespread. This reopened the debate on the mental health and well-being of employees, including those at the UN.



En peu de temps, la pandémie de la COVID-19 a bouleversé les conditions du travail, notamment avec la quasi généralisation du télétravail, et relancé le débat sur la santé mentale et le bien-être des employés, y compris au sein de l'ONU.

This begs the question as to whether the UN, which should be a reference to the entire planet, actually cares about its staff.

La question qui se pose est de savoir si l'ONU, qui devrait constituer une référence au plan mondial, veille véritablement sur son personnel ?

The UN is well aware of the suffering of some of its employees and is mindful of the close link between well-being and performance. That's why it developed the UN Workplace Mental Health and Well-being Strategy in 2018.

Alertée sur les souffrances de certains employés et consciente du lien étroit désormais établi entre bien-être et performance, l'ONU s'est dotée en 2018 d'une « Stratégie pour la santé mentale et le bien-être sur les lieux de travail ».

UN staff work in the field, on the front line. They have to deal with situations that are often highly challenging and stressful. This puts them under extreme pressure. They need to receive proper support. You might think that people working at headquarters are safe from all of this. They aren't. If you are recruited on a short-term or extra budgetary contract, you can be beset by deep feelings of insecurity. Although abuses of authority, discrimination, harassment or a lack of career prospects may seem less common, they are just as real and can cause mental anguish.

En première ligne, les fonctionnaires travaillant sur le terrain. Confrontés à des situations souvent très difficiles et anxiogènes, l'équilibre de certains collègues est mis à rude épreuve. D'où la nécessité de leur apporter un soutien adéquat. On pourrait penser que ceux qui travaillent au siège sont à l'abri. Ce n'est pas le cas. Être recruté sur des contrats de courte durée ou financé par des sources extrabudgétaires peut provoquer un profond sentiment d'insécurité. Moins fréquentes, mais bien réelles, les confrontations à des abus de pouvoir, de la discrimination, du harcèlement ou à un manque de perspectives de carrière peuvent être à l'origine de perturbations mentales.

In this month's issue we have chosen to look into whether the UN is taking the right steps to ensure staff well-being. We have provided a general overview of work undertaken in this field by both the Organization and the Swiss private sector.

Dans cette édition, nous nous sommes demandé si l'ONU prend suffisamment de mesures pour veiller au bien-être du personnel. Nous vous offrons donc un aperçu d'initiatives prises par l'organisation et par le secteur privé suisse.

So far so good, things seem to be progressing in the right direction. Yet we still need to spend more time dealing with the actual causes of mental suffering. As the saying goes, prevention is better than a cure.

S'il est clair que ce qui est entrepris est sur la bonne voie, il reste essentiel de s'attaquer davantage aux sources de souffrances mentales. Comme dit l'adage, « mieux vaut prévenir que guérir ».

Prisca Chaoui

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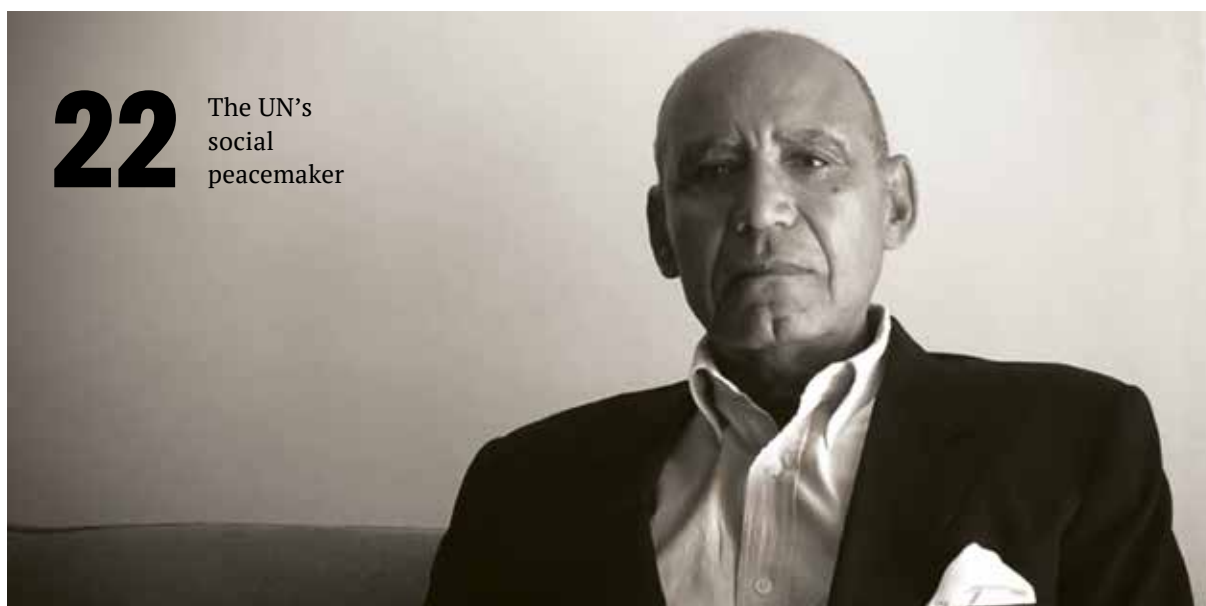
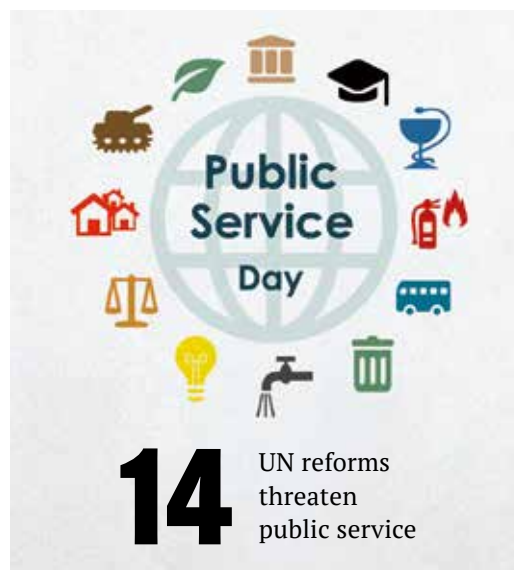
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The Staff Counsellor's Office: a place to relax

We're taking care of your mental health and well-being during Covid

What the Staff Counsellor's Office has done for you in these abnormal times

Mary Bridget Leahy*

These past seventeen months have been a challenge for us all; no one has been spared. We have had to adapt to ever-changing circumstances, continuing our work under the unfamiliar conditions of teleworking and teleconferencing. Overall, we adapted really well, even if some projects needed to be delayed or postponed to reduce risk.

For us in the Staff Counsellor's Office (SCO), our face-to-face training sessions and workshops, which we really cherish, had to be replaced with virtual sessions. We worked with UN partners, such as the Knowledge & Learning Commons (KLC), the Centre for Learning and Multilingualism (CLM), and the Office of the Ombudsman to deliver webinars and training sessions on various psychosocial

topics of interest to UN staff and the international community.

This year we received a high number of requests for support for staff who struggled during COVID-19. Some found that telecommuting made it hard to stay as connected and engaged with their teams as before. Additional stress from our new reality under COVID-19 exacerbated pre-existing mental health illness.

Many also reported feeling more dependent on substances such as alcohol or sugary foods. Staff also reported feeling isolated and concerned by not being able to access medical support from General Practitioners or attend hospital appointments to manage other health conditions.

In the SCO, we worked with our colleagues in UNOG medical, our network of SCOs around the globe, and the Human Resources Management Service (HRMS) to support staff and dependents who were medically evacuated to Geneva for treatment. Our medical colleagues had more demands on their time and expertise than ever before, and we are all very appreciative of them.

Thankfully, many of you also reported some positive experiences during the pandemic. For example, people used the time spent on commuting to exercise or to cook better meals, updated their IT skills, and enjoyed spending more time at home with their families.

A mosaic of emotions – good days and not so good days

While the research is still in its early stages, there is some evidence regarding the psychological impact; we are living through abnormal times, trying to cope and stay hopeful, yet as the pandemic continues it can be hard to stay positive.

If you are experiencing feelings of anxiety, insomnia, extreme fatigue or sadness, and if these symptoms last for more than a few days, please do reach out to us. We can try and help you navigate through your thoughts, and together come up with possible solutions.

Remember to be kind to yourself. You have only one body and one mind, and we have been living this experience for a long time now. While things may improve as the vaccination programmes are rolled out, we still have a way to go before we can return to a more ‘normal’ life. Our feelings will go up and down, we will have times where we are feeling energetic along with moments or days of exhaustion.

During the pandemic we offer virtual webinar dialogues and psycho-educational workshops on a range of psychosocial topics.

Everyone is welcome to attend our webinar/ dialogues run in collaboration with KLC, and our twice-monthly mindfulness meditation sessions.

TESTIMONIALS FROM STAFF WHO HAVE USED OUR SERVICE

A manager got in touch with the SCO as her staff member was feeling ready to return to work after an extended absence due to burnout and depression. However, the manager felt some anxiety about whether the colleague was really ready to return, and also worried about how the colleague would cope, since the role had not changed; how could we work together to prevent a relapse?

With advice from UNOG Medical Services and in collaboration with HRMS, the SCO discussed policies and various flexible options such as the possibility of coming back to work at 50 percent so the person could ease back in gently and not feel overwhelmed. The manager also considered how

she could discuss the staff member’s return with the team, in a way that would reduce stigma and some frustrations around the extended break (absence often means other staff have higher workloads).

The staff were encouraged to support one another by expressing their needs and sharing their coping strategies for managing deadlines and periods of exhausting work. The team adopted ‘huddles’, a meeting technique to regularly share what they were working on, and what was due or coming up soon, which enabled them to plan better and more evenly share the workload. Open discussions are now held daily, and staff ask for help from the team when they need it.

A staff member reported feelings of anxiety when he thought about how he would return to work in the office space after a long period of telecommuting.

We discussed his fears and what could be done to manage them, along with how the staff member could speak with his doctor, UNOG medical and

his manager. We encouraged him to share his worries so that together we could see what could be done to help him. After some sessions the staff member said: ‘I am very grateful for the support of the SCO as they helped me during this difficult time. I love my work and I am learning to control what I can control, and to ask for support when I need it.’



The Staff Counsellor's Office - Roza, Sharmila and Mary (from left to right)

For example, on 10 June 2021 we will be holding a webinar on the benefits of mindfulness meditation and self-care, looking at the scientific studies behind this practice, and giving you tips to help you cope during these challenging times. Please visit our online calendar with more information and instructions on how to join: commons.ungeneva.org

If you would like to come to one of our interactive workshops run in collaboration with CLM, please see the CLM website to find out more: learning.unog.ch/mc-index

“ A mosaic of emotions – good days and not so good days ”

How we work

The Staff Counsellor's Office SCO plays a key role in supporting well-being and mental health in the workplace. All services are available in English and French and are fully confidential.

We serve staff at UNOG and other UN organisations administered or supported by UNOG. Our client base numbers around 5,200 staff. In addition, the Office supports field offices for OHCHR (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights), UNCTAD (UN Conference on Trade and Development), UNDRR (UN Office

for Disaster Risk Reduction) and UNSSC (UN System Staff College). Consultants, interns, and sometimes family members, also seek our services.

We provide support at the organisational, workplace and individual levels.

Organisational: we are actively involved in prioritizing mental health initiatives, sensitizing senior managers, and representing the mental health and psychological well-being perspective in cross-functional discussions.

Workplace and team: we work closely with managers and teams, which includes the design and delivery of targeted workshops to address team concerns.

Individuals: we assess, contain, support, and accompany staff as appropriate, intervening in different ways.

If needed, and with consent, we will refer people to other UNOG services, such as the Medical Service, the Office of the Ombudsman, HR Legal and Policy Advisory Section, the Client Support Center, the Staff Coordinating Council, the Office of Staff Legal Assistance and other entities who can provide valuable support. ▶

* Mary Bridget Leahy is a Staff Counsellor at the United Nations Office in Geneva (UNOG).



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The Mental Health Strategy: a source of energy and optimism?

What do you know about the UN's mental health strategy?

We spoke to Miguel Mourato Gordo of the UN Office of Human Resources to find out how the strategy will improve staff well-being

Laura Johnson *

The workplace mental health and well-being strategy, which was formally launched by the Secretary-General in October 2018 and applies to all United Nations entities, is designed to make the system more effective by optimizing the psychological health of staff, improving organizational capacities to protect mental health and preventing mental health issues in the workplace.

The priorities of the strategy are to create a workplace that enhances mental and physical health and well-being, to develop and deliver the relevant services at all duty stations, to support staff who are facing mental health challenges and to ensure sustainable funding for the services put in place.

Implementation of the strategy began in 2019 and is overseen by a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary board. While at first the focus was on raising awareness, stigma reduction and ensuring equal access to psychosocial support, when the pandemic hit in 2020, activities had to be re-prioritized based on emerging needs.

A workplace that enhances mental and physical health and well-being

Managers have been encouraged to exercise flexibility to support a better work-life balance, to avoid scheduling meetings or sending work-related communications outside normal working hours and to favourably consider requests for compressed work schedules under the existing flexible working arrangements. In addition, core working hours were

temporarily lifted. The aim of these guidelines is to allow staff to disconnect fully and maintain the boundaries between professional and private time.

Learning resources, including factsheets and podcasts in all official languages, have been developed to give managers the skills and knowledge to create a healthy working environment. The first half of 2021 will see the release of online learning modules and a mental health dialogue.

A review of administrative practices is now under way to ensure that mental health and well-being are considered, both by supporting staff who are experiencing mental health issues and by minimizing psychosocial risks within the organization.

To promote health and reduce stigma, a series of live events have been held to answer staff questions on a broad range of related topics.

Staff were invited to write and share poems on the subject of mental health. Over 50 poems in seven languages were received from 20 countries, which were compiled into an eBook made available to all staff.

Telecommuting and virtual teamwork have been a real challenge for many. Guidelines have been published to help both staff and managers face it more effectively.

Staff whose lives have been affected by a mental health issue have joined an advisory panel to provide input on the priority action to be taken under the strategy.

Access to psychosocial support has improved since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the introduction of more counsellors across the UN system, tele-counselling through insurance providers and employee assistance programmes.

Efforts are ongoing to ensure that access to services is equal for all staff and that a high-quality system is in place.

Mental health support at headquarters and in the field

According to a survey conducted by the UN Field Staff Union (UNFSU), 83 per cent of staff working in the field were concerned about the impact of COVID-19. The results also showed that social

isolation and a heavy workload for continuous periods with the inability to take leave due to travel restrictions had led to a deterioration in mental health and well-being. The implementation board for the strategy has recognized these challenges and made them a priority.

Many countries where field duty stations are located have fewer psychologists and psychiatrists. The goal for the United Nations is to ensure equitable access to support no matter where we work.

Wherever they are, staff may need several different types of mental health support from the Organization. Action is being taken to ensure counselling support and referral to appropriate health-care services, educate managers about their role and put the right policies and administrative guidance in place.

Next steps to scale up the strategy

All United Nations organizations will be helped to develop their own plan based on the strategy. The Secretariat has established a mental health leadership team to oversee this process.

Other priorities include the expansion of resources available to all staff and more communication and engagement across the system.

The mental health strategy team measures its success by the level of engagement with staff. It has observed significantly more discussions about mental health and increased awareness over the past year. The Secretary-General and other leaders are promoting the importance of mental health and committing to action. Staff have been given opportunities to discuss mental health and reduce stigma.

The mental health strategy is not a panacea for all issues and challenges and does not stand alone. It is multi-pronged and fits into a system in which all the parts should link and work together.

Mental health and well-being are a priority now, more than ever. All staff are encouraged to follow the Twitter account for the strategy at @UN4MentalHealth or visit the web page at www.un.org/en/healthy-workforce/. ▶

* Laura Johnson is a UNOG Translator and a Member of the Staff Coordinating Council.



Le bien-être est désormais indissociable de la performance des employés

Bien-être au travail : le nouveau défi des grandes entreprises

Le bien-être au travail est devenu la priorité des grandes entreprises suisses. Une nouvelle réalité qui laisse place à des mécaniques bien rodées

Joachim Tapia-Almosnino *

Aujourd'hui, un tiers des travailleurs suisses sont en situation de stress ou au bord du burn-out », rapporte David Grandjean, porte-parole de Promotion Santé Suisse, une association qui offre des outils de gestion de la santé en entreprise, ainsi qu'un label de certification.

Sur la base d'une étude menée avec la HES Sciences appliquées de Zurich et l'université de Berne, il n'hésite pas à évoquer la question du bien-être en entreprise comme un véritable problème de santé publique.

Selon ce même rapport, le stress au travail coûterait environ 7,6 milliards de francs par an aux entreprises suisses, un chiffre édifiant que déplore Rosol Alsagban, psychologue du travail à Bienne : « le stress au travail est devenu l'un des plus gros enjeux organisationnels de notre époque ».

Des stratégies bien rodées

Pour faire face à ce phénomène, de grandes entreprises suisses ont décidé de prendre le problème à bras le corps et ont développé

des stratégies bien rodées : programmes d'assistance, outils de formation, ateliers traitant du burn-out ou encore des consultations sociales de soutien.

« Chez Nestlé, nous soutenons les collaborateurs dans leur développement et encourageons un environnement de travail flexible, équilibré, en fonction des obligations professionnelles et privées », indique Estelle Hain, porte-parole du groupe Nestlé Suisse.

Une démarche que d'autres grands groupes ont aussi choisi de développer : « Chez UBS, nous offrons des cours pour apprendre à gérer son énergie et son équilibre et proposons à nos collaborateurs des questionnaires leur permettant d'évaluer l'état de stress », précise Jean-Raphaël Fontannaz, porte-parole d'UBS pour la Suisse romande.

Des stratégies de plus en plus courantes qui apportent de vrais résultats d'un point de vue de l'épanouissement, du sentiment d'appartenance et de la productivité des employés.

« Désormais, les cantons et beaucoup d'assureurs soutiennent des stratégies de gestion de la santé en entreprise car les résultats sont concrets en termes de réduction des coûts liés à la santé des collaborateurs, de réduction du turn-over et d'augmentation de la productivité ou du bien-être », ajoute le porte-parole de Promotion Santé Suisse.

S'il fut un temps où les travailleurs cherchaient juste à subvenir à leurs besoins, aujourd'hui le travail est devenu un élément essentiel de notre identité, chacun cherche à s'y sentir bien et à y donner du sens.

« De nos jours les gens ne travaillent plus uniquement pour leur salaire. Le travail est devenu un facteur d'accomplissement et de bien-être », analyse Rosol Alsagban, psychologue biennoise du travail.

Il n'est plus rare de voir de grands groupes suisses proposer un programme de santé à leurs employés. Du massage au cours de yoga en passant par la salle de fitness équipée, rien n'est de trop pour plaire au personnel. Ces grandes entreprises n'hésitent pas à aller plus loin en développant des projets encore plus audacieux.

« UBS s'engage activement pour la santé de ses collaborateurs au travers de différentes initiatives, comme la mise sur pied d'ateliers de santé et de bien-être et des cours de yoga. Nous fidélisons nos collaborateurs avec notamment des congés sabbatiques, des primes d'ancienneté ou encore de nombreux tarifs préférentiels sur des biens ou des services. Nous offrons aussi l'accès à des structures de bien-être, de sport ou de repos », détaille le porte-parole d'UBS.

« Chez Nestlé, nous mettons en place des mesures de promotion de la santé et du sport, comme des sessions d'informations sur la nutrition ou l'accès à une quarantaine de clubs de sport », ajoute de son côté Estelle Hain.

“ Le travail est devenu un vrai facteur d'accomplissement et de bien-être ”

Une affaire de norme

Le bien-être au travail est aussi devenu une affaire de norme « Toutes les activités de Nestlé Suisse sont couvertes par une certification ISO 45001 », une norme internationale qui spécifie les exigences que doit respecter une organisation soucieuse d'améliorer la santé et la sécurité de ses employés, précise sa porte-parole. L'UBS, pour sa part a fait l'objet de nombreuses distinctions, telles que Top 50 – World's Most Attractive Employers.

Quant à l'association Promotion Santé Suisse, elle a mis en place un label et met à disposition des employeurs tous les instruments essentiels à la promotion du bien-être et de la santé. « Notre label Friendly Work Space a pour but d'aider les entreprises à instaurer des processus et des structures afin d'améliorer les conditions de travail. C'est un symbole d'excellence et tant la volonté que la patience seront nécessaire pour décrocher notre labellisation ».

Au final, comme le résume la psychologue du travail Rosol Alsagban, « c'est parfois juste un merci ou un compliment qui fait la différence ». ■

* Joachim Tapia-Almosnino est journaliste pour CH Media.



Public service day is celebrated worldwide on 23 June

UN reforms threaten public service

The UN is pushing for agile contracts in order to uberise the international civil service. Performance will be hit

Camilo Rubiano *

The notions behind public service, as we know it today, appeared with the creation and evolution of nation states in Europe, although it went to develop across the world. In France, for instance, it went from the concept of the common good to common utility and finally of general interest. Public services exist to avoid inequalities through fair access to services, such as justice, security, and health.

In many countries, public servants must take an oath before starting their careers. For instance, in Belgium they pledge to respect the constitution and the laws; in Germany, to defend the wellbeing of the people; and in France, to perform their duties “loyally”, “faithfully” or “conscientiously”.

In return for that allegiance and commitment, public servants traditionally enjoyed greater stability in employment and a higher salary when compared to the private sector, a status also aimed at guaranteeing their independence from the political signs or colours of the incumbent government.

The same idea – working towards the greater good – was the inspiration and finds resonance in the work of regional and international organisations that were created to improve cooperation between states and to tackle a wide range of global issues based on their mandate. Thus, equal requirements are desired for and required from individuals who wish to serve in the international civil service.

In order to make that clear, their independence and impartiality are enshrined in article 100 of the UN Charter. The International Civil Service Commission also underlines that the international civil service standards are impartiality, loyalty and independence.

As the world changes, organisations of every kind and people in general should evolve, adapt, and move forward as well (or we will die, according to a certain Darwin), including of course the UN and other international organisations.

“ The UN does not have to make staff the scapegoat for its financial crisis ”

Part of this plan has been laid out in the “Interim Report of the CEB Task Force on the Future of the United Nations System Workforce”. This report advocates for the UN system “to become more agile, effective and inclusive in the fulfilment of their mandates” and is influenced by digitalization and the current working arrangements because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, “agile” and “effective” – in this context – inevitably remind us of the “flexicurity” concept, repeated ad nauseam during past private sector reforms, but which ultimately gave us plain and simple flexibility at the expense of the employee.

Indeed, instead of understanding the importance of stable contractual arrangements during these difficult times and guaranteeing the independence of UN staff, a shift to “a more agile model contractual



Lorenzo Leonelli, UNHCR volunteer in Gevgelija, Macedonia

modality” is being suggested, designed to massively move staff to short and limited duration contracts.

In other words, the formal and definitive “uberisation” of the international civil service is being concealed under the guise of transformation or innovation. In practice, individual contractors, consultants and interns that help the UN system to deliver its mandate have already been facing relentless precariousness over the last few years.

The need to evolve and change, and to adapt to a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, for instance, should not result in an attack on international civil servants’ status, pay, or diminish their employment conditions.

Interestingly, a study carried out on how Covid-19 has hit European Union economies so differently found that the quality of governance was key for resilience and explained roughly 30 to 50 percent of the difference in the size of the economic impact during the ongoing pandemic. Essentially, countries that invested in public administration prior to the crisis were better equipped to address the challenges and come out almost unscathed.

“ Agile and effective inevitably remind us of the “flexicurity” concept ”

Making a parallel between that finding and the UN plan for its staff, we can argue that international organizations will not be able to deliver their mandate in a satisfactory and adequate manner if the proposed reform materializes, sacrificing the quality of governance. The essential work of the UN will never be as efficient if it cannot ensure its staff’s independence by giving them fair and secure employment.

Although the international civil servants’ status was laid out more than 70 years ago, that is not per se a reason for a change. The UN does not have to make staff the scapegoat for its financial crisis. Other solutions should be envisaged. Or we will have nothing to celebrate on 23 June in the future. ▀

* Camilo Rubiano is National Administration Officer at PSI and former ILO consultant.



© NOAA

The dumby octopus lives in the cold, abyssal depths ranging from 1,000 to 7,000 metres

Instead of mining the deep sea let's recycle our electronic waste

On this year's World Ocean Day, let's remember that our consumption of resources is inevitably linked to ocean health

Leonie Meier *

What do mountains of e-waste and the ocean floor have in common? They contain precious metals like gold, silver, nickel, cobalt, and copper, some of which are also found on the seafloor of the largest habitat on earth: the deep sea.

The deep sea is the entire ocean below 200 metres in depths reaching down to almost 11 kilometres in the Mariana Trench, where sunlight doesn't penetrate and temperatures are just above freezing point.

Many imagine the vast deep sea to be quite uninhabitable, but it actually supports a rich and often unique biodiversity. Abyssal plains, hydrothermal vents (seafloor hot springs) and seamounts (huge underwater mountains) are inhabited by cold-water corals forming reefs that are millions of years old, surrounded by

bioluminescent sea creatures completely adapted to the harsh conditions.

Similar to land-based resources such as forests, the deep sea offers humans a range of ecosystem services, including supporting seafood production, regulating the global climate and sequestering and storing carbon. Some may also be surprised to read that organisms discovered at extreme depths of the sea are used to speed up the detection of COVID-19. The deep sea acts like a compost, hosting all organisms needed to produce, transfer and recycle nutrients, and is thus essential for a healthy ocean.

Yet, mining companies are increasingly interested in exploiting the valuable mineral deposits of the seafloor, given the projected global rise in demand for precious metals and minerals used in low-carbon and digital technologies such as car batteries, windmills, and smartphones. Such a rush to mine

could have devastating impacts, including disrupting the carbon cycle, losing species and genetic resources, and releasing heavy metals and toxins which could be taken up by commercial fisheries.

All mineral related activities in the international seabed are currently regulated and controlled by the International Seabed Authority (ISA), an intergovernmental body established by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. ISA has so far issued licenses for 30 exploratory contracts in the international seabed.

NGOs and youth groups are mobilizing to demand that the ecosystem impacts should first be fully understood before mining in the international seabed is allowed - with success, as some tech giants and large corporations like Google, Samsung SDI, BMW, and Volvo have publicly supported a call for a moratorium on deep-sea mining, thereby committing not to source any minerals from the seabed and not to finance deep seabed mining activities.

This year marks the start of the UN Decade on Ocean Science - an opportunity to sufficiently study

the impacts of deep sea mining. In fact, there is already mounting evidence that suggests the costs of deep sea mining outweigh its benefits, and that the possible impacts of mining activities in the deep are not yet well understood.

Now is the time to focus all our attention and investments on expanding a circular economy. More investments should go into the acceleration of e-waste recycling, which promises to be technologically and economically feasible. As consumers, perhaps we should have a look at our urban mines too, and reflect on whether we need to constantly buy new gadgets as soon as the latest version is released. Around the world there are millions of unused electronic devices in our homes – old mobile phones, neglected games consoles, ancient stereos, outdated computer equipment and defunct printers to name a few. Why mine the seabed if urban mines are yet to be explored? ▶

* Leonie Meier is Associate Economic Affairs Officer at the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Section.



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Genève, ville de guerres

La Genève internationale devrait maintenir un lien aussi direct que possible avec les réalités du monde qu'elle sert

Olivier Coutau *

« (...) il n'y a plus de quartier, c'est une boucherie, un combat de bêtes féroces, furieuses et ivres de sang ; les blessés même se défendent jusqu'à la dernière extrémité, celui qui n'a plus d'armes saisit à la gorge son adversaire qu'il déchire avec les dents. »

On peut lire ces quelques lignes au début d'Un Souvenir de Solferino, un ouvrage qui changera le destin de Genève. Henry Dunant y raconte en détails, de façon quasi-journalistique, le déroulement d'une bataille qui mit aux prises, le 24 juin 1859, plusieurs

centaines de milliers d'hommes. Il met l'accent sur le sort des blessés et fait, à la fin du livre, quelques propositions qui conduiront à la Croix-Rouge, puis à la première Convention de Genève.

60 ans après, un autre conflit armé, la Première Guerre mondiale, mènera à la Genève internationale d'aujourd'hui. La Société des Nations est fondée en 1919. Elle sera opérationnelle l'année suivante, faisant de Genève le premier cœur d'une coopération internationale permanente.

La guerre est donc à l'origine même de la Genève internationale. Il serait facile de l'oublier. Du haut de la colline de Pregny, le regard porte sur les scintillements du lac et les neiges du Mont-Blanc. Le chaos des armes est bien loin. En mars dernier, l'ambassadeur sortant du Royaume-Uni, Julian Braithwaite, ne disait pas autre chose sur Twitter : « Geneva is so lovely a place. It is in a way so far away from the troubles of the world, that you can feel a bit divorced from them. »

Pourtant, la Genève internationale devrait maintenir un lien aussi direct que possible avec les réalités du monde qu'elle sert. Les Etats présents à Genève ont un rôle de premier plan en la matière. Les ONG et les médias, auxquels le canton de Genève accorde d'ailleurs une attention particulière, apportent aussi des contributions précieuses. Mais il existe d'autres ressources, plus rares. Par exemple, quelques photographes, en faisant preuve d'un courage physique hors du commun de nos jours, mènent un travail de longue haleine dans les profondeurs des conflits.

Matthias Bruggmann est l'un d'eux. Il a pris cette image le 1er mai 2014 en Syrie. Trois enfants dans une plantation d'oliviers sont surpris par le bruit d'une bombe tombée

quelques secondes plus tôt. Scène réelle de la vie quotidienne dans un pays en guerre.

La photographie, dans ce qu'elle a d'immédiat, peut solliciter davantage l'émotion que la raison. Elle n'en demeure pas moins un puissant outil de compréhension du monde. Le site geneve-int.ch, dans sa rubrique L'œil de la Genève internationale, fait ainsi appel à elle depuis plusieurs années.

Le cinéma, le documentaire, le récit, le témoignage, le théâtre ou les arts plastiques peuvent tous contribuer à rapprocher les organisations internationales de la substance de leur travail. La Broken Chair, qui fait face au Palais des Nations, en est une éloquente illustration.

Les démarches de ce type ont donné naissance, avec le Souvenir de Dunant, à la Genève internationale. Aujourd'hui, elles peuvent l'aider à ne pas être que « so lovely a place ». Gageons que les espaces d'expositions genevois, actuels ou à venir, sauront le montrer. ▶

* Olivier Coutau est délégué à la Genève internationale pour la République et canton de Genève.



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Fighting corruption is vital to establishing good governance

How education can help us out of corruption

One is the architect of the SDGs, the other is the co-negotiator of UNCAC. In this article, they discuss the value of education in fighting corruption

Daniel Nazarov *

M. Seth*, what are the most effective tools to fight corruption?

On the largest level, there is the creation of effective institutions, such as independent and specialized anti-corruption agencies and audit institutions on the national and international scales; secondly: the strengthening of judicial institutions, and finally: multilateral efforts such as the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC).

These tools can only be effective if accompanied by attitudinal and behavioral shifts. These shifts can be brought through awareness campaigns. International Anti-Corruption Day (9 December), for example, is a great opportunity to make people aware of the scourge of corruption, how deep-rooted it is, and how it upends the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

When we were creating the SDGs, many countries opposed mentioning corruption on the grounds

that it would marginalize developing states. But corruption is something present in countries rich and poor. We polled almost 10 million people worldwide on their priorities, and corruption ranked the highest in these peoples' minds, despite their government representatives' resistance in the halls of the UNGA.

“ When we were creating the SDGs, many countries opposed mentioning corruption ”

Attitudinal-behavioral shifts depend largely on education and training. Only through this can we shape competent specialists in the field while fostering the concepts of integrity and personal values to oppose corruption in all forms. In fact, education and training directly fights the scourge in peoples' minds by changing the general attitude that corruption is too big and deep-rooted to fight.

The most effective training and education programs focus on providing a strong balance between academic and theoretical knowledge on topical issues, and core competencies in areas such as leadership and negotiation skills. To ensure the effectiveness of existing anti-corruption mechanisms through education and training, UNITAR's Executive Diploma and a master's program on Anti-Corruption and Diplomacy, jointly implemented with the International Anti-Corruption Academy (IACA), provide this balance.

“ Education and training directly fight the scourge in peoples' minds ”

Dr. Stelzer*, what are the landmark events in the history of international anti-corruption efforts?

There is a clear division between the period before and after UNCAC. UN anti-corruption action goes back to 1975, when the UNGA adopted the first resolution against corruption, targeting transnational corporations and their intermediaries. The next large steps were all regional: the Inter-American

Convention against Corruption in 1996; the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention in 1997; and the EU's Criminal Law Convention on Corruption in 1999. These all led to the negotiation and adoption of UNTOC (UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime) in 2000.

When I was appointed Permanent Representative of Austria in 2001, the first session of the Crime Commission (Commission on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice) that I chaired, adopted a resolution describing corruption as a structural impediment to sustainable development. This very same Crime Commission helped prepare for the negotiations of what later became the main instrument in the fight against corruption: UNCAC. With 187 parties, UNCAC allowed us to address corruption on the basis of the rule of law, changing the idea that it is too big to fight.

“ The most effective training and education programs focus on cross-cutting approaches ”

By 2006, the UNCAC implementation progress was still slow. I could not see this initiative, which I had negotiated and signed, wither away. To speed up the process, the head of the Anti-Corruption branch at UNODC and I decided to start training civil servants from developing nations in anti-corruption, then we turned this project into a program, and the program into an institution. Four years later, IACA was formed.

IACA's main achievement is its highly successful academic program, with over 3000 master's alumni. Our experience has shown that the implementation of UNCAC depends on the strengthening of anti-corruption systems' resilience by actors, who to a large degree, benefited from our academic programs. ▀

* Daniel Nazarov is a Consultant at the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).

* M. Seth is the current Executive Director of UNITAR.

* Dr. Stelzer is the Dean of the International Anti-Corruption Academy.



Hany Abdel-Aziz, President of the Staff-Management Committee (SMC)

The UN's social peacemaker

Hany Abdel-Aziz chairs staff-management consultations. He tells us what needs to be fixed at the UN, starting with better dialogue and mobility

Prisca Chaoui and Ian Richards *

As President of the UN's Staff Management Committee, do you think management is really consulting staff representatives on conditions of service and welfare as it should?

The rules on staff-management consultations are over a decade old. It is a result of much give and take, like any negotiation, and is a compromise. Still, it has been a useful tool.

This being said, there is room for improvement. Many grey zones exist, other subjects are ignored, for example how administrative instructions are issued.

Many issues are in my humble opinion procedural. For example, the UN's structure has evolved. We

have new entities that need to be represented while others carry less weight than before. We need to look at how the field is represented, including peacekeeping and special political missions.

We also need a simple mechanism for conflict resolution. The role of the bureau could also be widened and be given authority to submit recommendations to the SMC plenary. I am sure that staff and management can identify plenty of ways that the consultative process can be adapted to our everchanging organization structure. So yes, the SMC has been useful and still is as it currently stands. But it could benefit from an update based on lessons learned and recent developments in order to reflect a better-balanced approach.

You have worked for more than 30 years at the UN, including in senior positions in the field. Have issues affecting staff changed much?

We need to pay more attention to the conditions of work for staff in the field, and by this I mean the real field, not luxury duty stations like Cyprus and Brindisi. They work in the heat and rain, with malaria, facing physical and mental risks on a daily basis. Their workload is sometimes 7 days a week. I think even on a salary level or global compensation level, they are mistreated. They should have better conditions to continue working and to continue attracting competent elements.

Another subject is rotation. I know this won't please many colleagues but it's a reality. People serving in the field in those difficult conditions, are effectively second- if not third-class citizens. If there is no rotation system like at UNHCR or UNICEF, you will not establish fairness but resentment. There should either be a mandatory rotation system or a points system to allow access to higher-level positions.

Going from different headquarters in the US and Europe to the field also brings a wealth of information and expertise, which they can bring back to the same duty station or to another.

I don't buy the argument that staff can't move because they bought an apartment or real estate. We are a para-diplomatic organization. We always say we need more or less the same advantages and privileges of diplomats, and we have many of them already, but diplomats manage to move, even though they also have families and own apartments.

The Organization should help staff move back and forth between headquarters and the field. I don't know why our SG is not implementing a system like this. They say it is for financial reasons but money is always found for a good cause.

Few people appreciate the experience staff gain in the field, the pleasure of getting concrete, tangible achievements. It is so rewarding. Sitting at HQ pushing paper is not in my opinion the best thing for the organization, nor for member states.

It also seems that certain "luxury" peacekeeping duty stations are reserved, and we know what that

means. Reserved without enough diversity and I don't have to be more specific.

A fair system can bring happy staff, capable of performing. The UN has to be versatile, has to be flexible, in terms of location, sharing experience, working together, and sharing the burden.

How in your view can the Secretary-General make use of the SMC in order to improve his relations with staff unions?

There is an issue of imbalance. The SG is in a particular delicate situation at SMC in the sense that he is the Chief Administrative Officer of the Organization, and the SMC reports to him, but he is also management.

His management representatives at SMC have tremendous access to him and his front office. On the other side staff representatives do not have the same access. In my humble opinion it's necessary to balance what is an unbalanced situation.

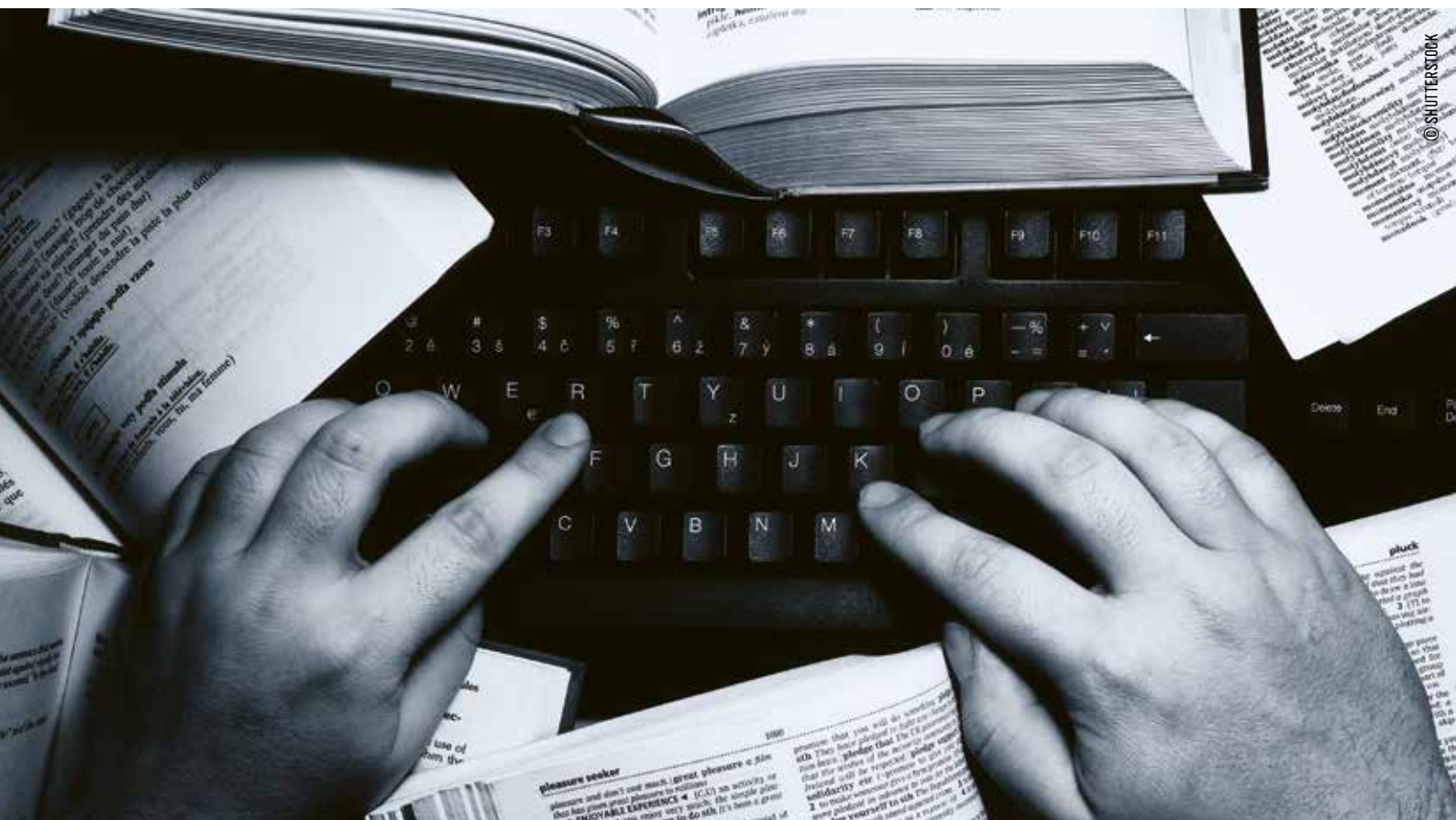
I have requested more than once for the SG to meet with staff representatives, even with the presence of management, in order that they be able to submit to him their point of view concerning questions of conflictual nature for which there has been no consensus.

This has not happened. I have no idea if this is because of the SG's very heavy, political schedule, or from advice given to him not to do so. I am therefore using this forum to reiterate to management and to the SG that there is a need to meet at least once, if not twice a year, for one hour, no more, with staff representatives in an organized manner.

The meeting could be planned well in advance with questions submitted beforehand and a format agreed upon in order to prevent a descent into micro-discussions. I am calling for such a meeting at least once if not twice a year with all the representatives of staff.

This is my advice and my recommendation, which I will reiterate again. The SMC needs to be more balanced. ▶

* Prisca Chaoui is the Editor-in-chief of UN Today.
Ian Richards is an Economist at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).



Overwork is related to the act of working beyond one's strength or capacity, causing physical and/or mental distress in the process

The UN is a beacon for translators around the world

Adapting to adopted cultures: how it feels to move from a private sector translation job to the UN

Laura Johnson*

Translators can be strange people. Usually they are happy to stay in the background, quietly working the magic that can transform an incomprehensible mess into a serviceable working document. However, if you make an ill-advised comment showing that you have not grasped the intellectual nature of their work or have overestimated what machine translation can do, you will find they can be surprisingly fierce.

Even before I arrived at the United Nations in 2018 and gained hundreds of translator colleagues, I felt

more qualified than most to generalize about my fellow professionals. Although many translators work on a freelance basis, I had already been part of a fairly large team at a company providing documentation services for large engineering firms.

While I had many dedicated colleagues over the years, the low pay and poor working conditions meant that there would inevitably be those for whom accuracy and attention to detail was above their pay grade.

Matters were made worse by the fact that freelancers are paid by the word and forced to offer discounts for texts that may have been poorly translated by others. Many simply cannot afford to do a good job. That leaves in-house staff rushing to fix the work they deliver and then grumbling in turn about the perceived pettiness of the single person employed to ensure quality at the top of the supply chain.

“ Translators add value by noticing things so that no one else has to ”

I often felt that the entire sector was running on fumes, dependent on the amazingly large number of translators who feel compelled to go the extra mile for no other reason than that they love working with words.

No detail too small

By contrast, at the United Nations, everybody cares about everything to do with language and writing. I have witnessed discussions on matters as seemingly arcane as the different uses of a single punctuation mark and the use of variant spellings in quotations and never known a colleague fail to have an opinion.

That does not mean that United Nations translators are dogmatic or petty. It is more that they will never decide something is unimportant without having considered the possible impact on the reader's understanding of the text.

“ Unfortunately, the collaborative atmosphere is under threat ”

The difference between a text that is well-written and one that is difficult to read comes from the cumulative effect of many tiny decisions. A person skim-reading a document for work is not expected to appreciate the difference made by any of these taken individually.

Indeed, in many professional contexts, what translators aim for is precisely to make it possible to use their text for its intended purpose without

the writing drawing attention to itself. In other words, translators add value by noticing things so that no one else has to.

The United Nations also has strength in numbers. At my previous workplace, my colleagues and I could often come up with a better solution than the one found by the lone freelancer working from home. That effect is multiplied here, with the much higher numbers of current staff and the stronger institutional memory and culture. Unfortunately, the collaborative atmosphere is under threat from a combination of pressure to increase productivity and remote working.

An integral part of the system

Translators in the English Section also draft summary records of official meetings. This work has given me a much better understanding of where translation fits in at the United Nations. When I first arrived, I was somewhat mystified as to why translators worked in a Division called Conference Management and why that Division was one of the largest in the Organization.

“ The United Nations also has strength in numbers ”

I soon discovered that many types of meetings are based entirely on a discussion of multilingual documentation and that meetings are how what we call the intergovernmental process happens. I have seen first-hand the time that can be lost over a misunderstanding of a single word or a failure to use the generally agreed terminology. Luckily, translators and other staff working behind the scenes are there to make sure that it doesn't happen more often.

I have sometimes heard the words “private sector” used to bat down concerns raised by United Nations translators about changes to their working conditions. The implication is that translators elsewhere would resent our attempts to defend the quality of our work. That is not how I used to think at all. On the contrary, knowing that there were institutions where my profession was still valued gave me great hope. ▶

* Laura Johnson is a UNOG Translator and a Member of the Staff Coordinating Council.



Equal opportunities should be enjoyed by all staff

Is there a career development for YPP staff members at the UN?

Some suggestions on the way forward

Bradford Smith *

National Competitive examination (NCE) and Young Professional Programme (YPP) staff members, having passed through highly competitive and rigorous written and oral examinations, which are mandated by the General Assembly to improve the geographic representation of the organisation and attract and retain talented young professionals, join the Organization with pride, excitement, determination and expectations for career advancement and development.

However, a great number of them experience stalls in their career advancement and have become frustrated and disillusioned by a system that did not give the expected attention to them after they are recruited. Many NCEs/YPPs, who have excellent credentials and extensive work experience, including in the field, have remained at the same level for many years, including at the P2 level.

Frustration with the lack of career prospects has led to some resignations among YPPs at the P2 and P3

levels with others reconsidering long-term careers with the United Nations, which is disconcerting, in particular given the significant investments in administering the programme.

While it is understood that the YPP staff play a leading role in their professional development, the UN Secretariat and Departments are expected to play a supporting role, putting effective systems in place to enhance and support career decisions. Information provided to YPP candidates highlights that from the moment a YPP joins the United Nations, that YPPs can be certain of a support system for career development. It goes on to emphasize that the United Nations is “serious” about career support and that managers are there to provide a work environment to “positively and qualitatively” support career development. Unfortunately most YPPs receive little or no support from managers or the system as a whole.

In the case of OHCHR for example, frustration with the lack of career advancement led to a group of NCEs/YPPs staff members to take

action. In 2020, the OHCHR NCE/YPP Group, in consultation with the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council and the OHCHR Staff Committee, began to meet and organize themselves in search of positive changes. They also met with Senior Management and Human Resources to discuss experiences and propose solutions. As a result, Management has agreed to expand measures to make NCE/YPP applicants more visible in promotion processes, expand coaching services, provide data and statistics and to report on progress.

These are steps in the right direction and the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council welcome this positive development. We will continue to follow-up to ensure that these YPPs/NCEs are no longer left behind in selection exercises, so that the NCE/YPP programme delivers on its objectives for the benefit of the UN as a whole. ▀

* Bradford Smith is the Executive Secretary of the UNOG Staff Coordinating Council.



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H.E. Tatiana Molcean in an exhibition of hand-made carpets, October 2020

Meet Tatiana Molcean, Moldova's multi-tasking ambassador

Permanent representatives run diplomatic missions, but they are also human rights defenders, trade facilitators and cultural ambassadors

Prisca Chaoui *

Please tell us briefly about your career, why you joined the diplomatic service and how you were appointed to your current position as Permanent Representative of your country to the UN in Geneva.

I joined the diplomatic service of the Republic of Moldova about 17 years ago, after getting my degree in international law. It was more a fortunate course of events than a long sought-after dream, since initially I saw myself pursuing a different career, that of a lawyer, defending people's rights in the courts. Yet, because I had received an invitation to apply for a position in the foreign service, I seized the opportunity and have never regretted it.

It is hard work and requires lots of preparation, consistency and usually long hours at your work desk, particularly during the first few years, so it is a lot less colourful than one would imagine in a movie. Nevertheless, through all of these years, working on different issues and in different positions, it was always extremely interesting, challenging and gratifying at the same time.

As a deputy minister, prior to this position, I worked closely with our mission in Geneva to promote Moldova's interests among the numerous international organisations located here. I can definitely say that the multilateral environment is the one I appreciate the most, and the one where I can be of greatest support to my country.

That is how I managed to be appointed to this position. The bonus is that this has brought me to the very heart of the place where human rights are debated and reviewed, a matter which has been very close to my heart for a very long time.

Can you share with us an event (positive or negative) that has marked your career and explain why?

It is difficult to pinpoint one or even two events that marked my career in a positive sense, since usually once you successfully conclude one project there is another one round the corner, galloping towards you. Of course, there were a few events that might be considered as highlights, but it is unfair to single out one in particular, since even minor events are priceless. It was and it is such a great pleasure and an immense satisfaction when you see the results of the work of your institution or team having a concrete and positive impact in a specific country or region, or even the world.

I do remember the negative ones, however, all too well, and unfortunately, there were too many of them. Signing the books of condolences is a practice or protocol that we follow in cases where tragic events happen in other countries. This was and still is a difficult experience for me.

About two years ago I had to sign a message of condolences in relation to an accident that happened in a public space in a country from our region and claimed the lives of many children and young people. I was devastated, and even struggled to finish the message as tears were running down my face. You ask yourself if it could have been prevented, if we will manage to avert such tragedies in the future... The answers are usually not the ones I like.

What are the main national priorities that you defend before the UN and its agencies in Geneva?

Geneva is one of the most international cities in the world. Actually, I would say that it is the most international, not just because of the number of international organisations, NGOs, or diplomatic missions that are located here, but also on account of the range of topics covered, such as peace and security, disarmament, humanitarian action, human rights and migration, labour, health, trade and intellectual property rights, development, and transport to name but a few.

Selecting one or two priorities is indeed a challenge. Of course, I abide by our national work programme with the UN, prioritising the work of the Human Rights Council for example, but International Geneva has its own way of imposing an agenda and dictating priorities.

For instance, during the last year or so our agenda has been dominated by topics such as health, vaccines and medicines. We interact daily with colleagues at WHO, GAVI and other organisations in order to find solutions to the current pandemic. We also work with WTO, WIPO, UNECE and other partners to help our economies recover, whilst keeping trade flows stable and enabling markets to operate in an open, transparent and fair way.

Multitasking is something that missions of small countries have to deal with. It is intense, but extremely rewarding as well.

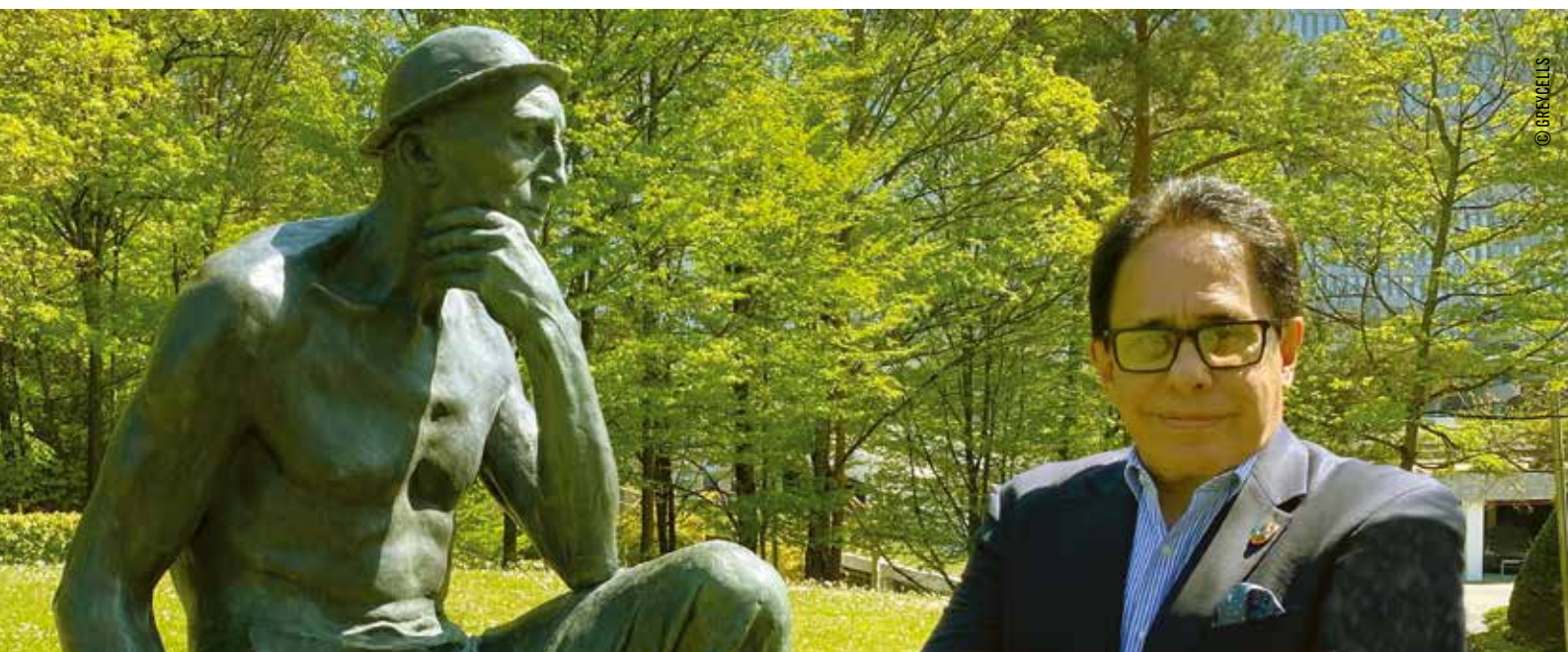
What are the main aspects of Moldovan cultural heritage that you try to highlight as part of your work as an Ambassador?

Moldova is a small country, but it has an impressive cultural and artistic heritage. I am so honoured to be able to show this and share part of it with the international community in Geneva.

Already in September last year, between the lockdowns during the pandemic, we managed to organise an exhibition of traditional Moldovan hand-woven carpets at the Palais des Nations. What is unique about these carpets is not only the manner in which they have been woven for hundreds of years, but also the fact that they are mostly the work of women from rural areas, who have a story to tell through such pieces of art. This is so valuable and I wanted to emphasise this fact.

As soon as conditions allow, we will continue to organise similar projects, highlighting the skilful work of Moldovan artisans in producing traditional costumes, paintings and sculptures. Food and wine are also a part of our heritage that I wish to make more people aware of. I would also love to share and show the richness of Moldovan music and draw attention to its famous composers like Eugen Doga, whose waltz has been included by UNESCO in the list of the masterpieces of the 20th century. ▀

* Prisca Chaoui is the Editor-in-chief of UN Today.



Alejandro Bonilla García at the Gardens of the ILO, May 2021

Living to tell the tale when defending ILO Standards

It is the unexpected that changes and forges our lives

Alejandro Bonilla García *

In 1993, while on a mission to Bogota, promoting and defending ILO standards and its position on pension systems reforms, I lay awake with jetlag around 3:00 a.m. in my hotel room when I saw a slip of paper being slid through the door.

It was a warning note. “You ILO people, you should leave the country; if we stick to your standards and follow your recommendations, we are going to sink further into underdevelopment. Go away!”

I was not particularly worried but rather a bit puzzled. How did someone know in what hotel and room I was? I knew that the message was related to the ongoing discussions on pension reform at a time when privatizing public pension schemes was perceived to be a “modern” alternative. Being “socially minded,” swimming against the tide, had become a risky business.

The mission continued and after a long working-day with the social partners, my colleague, the late Taoufik Bendahou and I decided to spend some time at the lobby of the hotel to discuss the outcomes of the day.

Suddenly, the army rushed into the hotel with their arms ready and with dogs sniffing everywhere. They asked everybody to leave immediately and go across the street. Soldiers were making sure that everybody stayed on the opposite side of the street.

Out of nowhere, a woman stood next to me and grabbed my arm. She said “Señor Bonilla, this is for you. You should leave. You should leave now!” I remember her face and her deadly serious expression. Before I could pronounce a single word, she had vanished into the crowd.

Long story short, the authorities confirmed the seriousness of the event and told us, with regret,

they could not guarantee our safety and that indeed it would be better to leave as soon as possible.

We were told that dogs were in our rooms and that, after inspection, all our belongings would be returned to us. Taoufik and I were separated. Each one had five bodyguards and we were instructed to get into a different car and sit in the back, without resting our heads on the seat.

“ You should leave. You should leave now! ”

Even inside the cars, we were closely surrounded by the bodyguards with their backs to us and their weapons at hand. They explained to us that one modus-operandi to execute people was that a motorcycle would approach the car and the rider in the back would shoot the target inside.

We arrived at the airport stressed after scrutinizing every car or motorbike that drove near us. The bodyguards never left us until we were seated on an Air France plane to Paris. Since it was impossible to reach consensus on the way forward on pensions in Colombia, in December 1993, “Law 100” on Social Security was passed, including an impossible mix of everybody’s recommendations.

Breaking news no more

Against all odds, a few years later, I led a team back to Bogota to assess the impact and results of Law 100. We worked under the control of strict security, aware of the utmost confidentiality of the evaluation process and the report we were tasked to prepare.

After several weeks, we were finally ready to present the findings to the President, the Ministers of Labour and Finance, the President of the Central Bank and the social partners. On the day of the presentation, we were sure to be in the spotlight.

The crucial day arrived and at breakfast, I took a copy of “El Tiempo,” looking for some last-minute news that we could possibly consider in our presentation. And there it was – a full summary of our report! That would not be the only surprise of the day.

At the convention centre, after the usual protocols, I was invited to take the floor and give a technical presentation of the assessment. Suddenly the lights went off. After a few

minutes they came back, the sound too, but the PowerPoint presentation was lost for good. I delivered an impromptu version of the results of the evaluation, which were not good.

May you live in interesting times

When I joined the ILO as a Social Security Actuary, I thought everything would boil down to doing scientific calculations and that if they were sound, good decisions would always follow. I learnt that politics, interests, and human behaviour are not always aligned with science. Every day I had reasons to be pessimistic but luckily, also many reasons to be optimistic. I remember telling myself that being an international civil servant, I did not have the right to give up and not to try to do the right thing. In retrospect, had I known then what I know now, I would have done some things differently as regards to form, not substance, and I do not regret having provoked hatred and allergic reaction, as I always knew that it meant I was doing the right thing.

“ I remember telling myself that being an international civil servant, I did not have the right to give up ”

Like everyone else, I had successes and failures, but I consider it a privilege to have started my international career at a time when social issues, solidarity and the concept of social insurance were being questioned. We specialists could have been carried away by the tide of so-called modernity but many of us resisted, particularly in the ILO. The stands, calculations, and trench warfare of ILO, other specialized agencies and the UN secretariat, have paved the way for social security and social protection to move forward. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic has shown that there is still much to be done and that multilateralism must be reinvented and enhanced. I am confident, however, that member states, as well as the current and future generations of international civil servants, will rise to the challenge, whatever challenges life surprises them with. ▀

* Alejandro Bonilla García is a Former Senior Official of ILO and President of Greycells.



Time for a sunset cocktail

Fun for all the family at UN Beach this summer

**Forget complicated international travel.
Come enjoy our sunloungers, paddleboards, bar and more**

Froylan Silveira *

UN Beach, originally created in 1947, is open once again for the summer season. Far from Geneva's crowded beaches it offers a safe environment for you and your family, and plenty of fun.

It features a beautiful open restaurant by the marina to enjoy lunch or dinner, plenty of colourful sunloungers to work on your tan while sipping a cocktail, a beach bar at which to enjoy

snacks and catch up with friends, a rooftop terrace, barbecues for your family get-togethers, a picnic area, pedalos to go on the lake, a pool for your young kids.

The jumping-in-the-lake experience has also got better with a new floating pontoon. No more queuing at the stairs to go into the lake and paddle boards are easily up for grabs by our seasonal subscribers – not to mention a new

toboggan for the kids. We have also improved the marina with a fully-renovated port that provides a much better experience for our port users, making it safer to access boats and walk around the marina during sunset.

The restaurant is open from 12-2.30 p.m. and 6.45-9.45 p.m. serving hot and cold dishes. During and in between, the beach bar keeps a constant flow of refreshments, drinks and snacks. There is limited parking, so users are advised to try to come by bike or foot. The nearest bus stop is Jardin Botanique (in front of WTO) and the nearest parking garage is at the Sécheron train station.

UN Beach is exclusively for staff of international organizations, diplomatic missions, accredited media and international NGOs. For more information and to get a seasonal subscription for you and your family members, please visit www.unport.org.

Please note that UN Port is committed to ensuring safety of its users and Covid-19 rules are strictly followed.

Here are some photos from last summer. ▶

* Froylan Silveira is a UN staff member.





Trois navires de la Flotte Belle-Epoque

Bienvenue à bord de la Compagnie Générale de Navigation

Depuis plus d'un an, nous naviguons à vue.
La crise sanitaire semble avoir modifié la ligne
d'horizon et des entreprises coulent, mais pas la CGN

Laetitia Fabre *

Embarquement immédiat pour une traversée du lac Léman avec Andreas Bergmann, nommé directeur général six mois avant le premier confinement.

Difficile de se promener au bord du lac sans remarquer les superbes navires estampillés Compagnie Générale de Navigation (CGN). Difficile aussi parfois d'oser s'en approcher. Si un quart des pendulaires effectue la traversée en bateau grâce à l'une des trois lignes de transport public de la CGN, les trois quarts restants n'ont pas encore franchi ce pas.

Il est pourtant décisif pour Andreas Bergmann : « une fois qu'on est monté à bord, c'est très difficile d'y renoncer ».

Alors comment expliquer que tant de personnes s'encombre dans les embouteillages, confinés dans leurs voitures individuelles, pour relier les deux rives du lac, surtout quand l'on sait que « chacune des lignes de transport public fait gagner une heure de vie par jour et par voyageur » ?

Conscient d'être à la barre d'un bijou qui « allie avec élégance l'histoire et les enjeux du futur », Andreas

Bergmann ne tarit pas d'éloges sur les 220 employés de la compagnie qui fêtera bientôt son 150ème anniversaire. Leur qualité la plus précieuse à l'heure de la course à la spécialisation, est sans conteste la polyvalence. « Un capitaine qui pilote La Suisse, le bateau amiral, en été peut se trouver en hiver dans l'atelier de menuiserie. Je trouve cela magnifique, c'est une vraie force pour nous » confie le directeur qui sait depuis sa formation dans l'hôtellerie que le succès ne peut être que collectif. Et le succès est au rendez-vous, contre vents et marées.

“ Pour sauver notre planète et notre existence, il faut décarboner le transport ”

Depuis le début de la crise sanitaire, une partie de la flotte a dû être immobilisée et le chantier naval a subi des interruptions d'activité. Les lignes de transport public ont quant à elles été reconnues essentielles pour la communauté lémanique, 1.2 million de passagers y ayant recours chaque année.

La part de marché de la CGN se monte à 25% du transport de riverains, cela ne suffit pas pour le directeur général qui espère la doubler rapidement. S'il est pressé, c'est pour la bonne cause : « pour sauver notre planète et notre existence, il faut décarboner le transport », affirme celui qui n'a pas attendu d'être à la tête de la CGN pour attirer toujours plus de voyageurs vers une mobilité douce.

Après avoir travaillé en Europe dans l'aviation puis dirigé le TGV Lyria, le bernois est sorti des rails et semble être comme un poisson dans l'eau au milieu des bateaux. Fort de sa conviction qu'il est possible de bâtir un monde meilleur, il insiste : cela n'a rien d'un optimisme naïf « il y a une vraie opportunité pour cela à la CGN ».

A la pointe de la technologie et soutenue par un large réseau de donateurs publics et privés, la CGN possède la plus grande flotte au monde de bateaux centenaires. C'est la flotte Belle-Époque, celle des croisières.

La maintenir n'est pas une mince affaire. Surtout lorsqu'il n'y a plus de fournisseurs. Restaurer des bateaux centenaires c'est bien, le faire en allant jusqu'à produire l'outil permettant d'en resserrer

les boulons c'est encore mieux. On pourra le constater fin 2021 à l'inauguration du Rhône flambant neuf. Ce savoir-faire est un des trésors de la CGN confie Andreas Bergmann qui rappelle que « le patrimoine à préserver est autant physique qu'immatériel ».

Que l'on fuie les embouteillages ou que l'on découvre les rives du lac Léman lors d'une croisière, l'expérience client est au cœur des préoccupations de la CGN. Embarquer à bord d'un de ses bateaux, c'est s'accorder un moment hors du temps. Pour un événement inoubliable on pourra d'ailleurs privatiser un navire. « Tout est possible et nous avons une équipe dédiée pour s'occuper des souhaits de nos clients » dit Andreas Bergmann. Une offre sur mesure, pour un projet d'évasion pouvant embarquer 50 à 1000 personnes.

Encore faut-il que les restrictions sanitaires le permettent. Pour l'heure, le port du masque est de rigueur et les sièges extérieurs sont privilégiés. Et le directeur d'ajouter : « si les bateaux devaient se remplir trop, nous réduirons le nombre de passagers ». Le cap est donc maintenu : préserver les conditions de voyage, améliorer l'expérience client et l'impact écologique sans rien enlever de sa superbe à la flotte, historique ou moderne.



Andreas Bergmann, directeur général de la CGN

Décidemment, Andreas Bergmann a bien fait de jeter l'ancre à Lausanne et d'attirer dans son filet de nouveaux partenaires. Au menu des prochaines saisons : un projet dont Café Léman est complice. ▀

* Laetitia Fabre est rédactrice indépendante et entrepreneure.



L'Ayurveda repose sur l'harmonie entre le corps et l'esprit

Les vertus de l'Ayurveda

Médecine traditionnelle de l'Inde, l'Ayurveda n'est pas qu'un système de santé, c'est aussi un art de vivre

Muriel Scibilia *

Née il y a 5 000 ans, l'Ayurveda prend à la fois en compte le corps, les émotions et la dimension spirituelle. Elle décrit chaque être humain comme une réplique miniature des cinq éléments qui composent l'univers : l'air, le feu, l'eau, la terre et l'éther (l'espace). A travers ce prisme, il importe de repérer la constitution énergétique dominante d'une personne, son tempérament, appelé « Dosha ». L'Ayurveda distingue trois Doshas qui résument la constitution physique, mentale et spirituelle : les tempéraments de feu, nommés « Pitta », ceux d'eau et de terre (Kapha) et ceux d'air et éther (Vata).

L'énergie Pitta parcourt le foie, l'intestin grêle, le sang et les yeux et gère la digestion, l'assimilation et la température. Déséquilibrée, elle génère inflammation, colère et frustration. On trouve Kapha dans l'estomac, les poumons, la langue et le plasma. Elle régit la lubrification du corps,

l'hydratation et le système immunitaire. En équilibre, elle incite à l'amour, à la douceur et au pardon. Vata gère les mouvements de l'organisme, les pulsations du cœur et la respiration. Elle loge surtout dans le côlon, le système nerveux, la peau, les oreilles et les os. En déséquilibre, elle crée de la peur et de l'anxiété.

Acquises avant la naissance, ces grandes forces vitales évoluent selon les cycles de la vie, les émotions, l'alimentation, le climat, l'heure ou les saisons. L'automne est Vata, l'été Pitta, le printemps et l'hiver Kapha.

En observant le type physique et psychologique d'une personne, on peut savoir quel dosha domine. Les personnes minces et légères sont Vata. Celles pleines d'entrain, coléreuses et sujettes aux inflammations sont Pitta, et qui est charpenté et modéré est Kapha. Identifier son dosha dominant

permet de repérer ses points faibles et de respecter sa nature.

Quand les doshas ne sont plus équilibrés, des dysfonctionnements et des maladies apparaissent. Pour rétablir la situation, le médecin dispose d'une palette de traitements qu'il adapte selon le tempérament du patient : alimentation, respiration, massages, chromothérapie (traitement par la couleur), lithothérapie (les pierres), sons (mantras), visualisation des émotions et méditation.

Un traitement ayurvédique comporte plusieurs étapes :

- L'élimination des toxines via tous les orifices, dont la bouche, les oreilles et les yeux. Des régimes ad-hoc permettent d'y parvenir et de recouvrer le bien être en peu de jours.
- Un rééquilibrage des doshas à l'aide de massages à l'huile de sésame tiède, d'exercices de respiration, du yoga, de la méditation, de la musique, des chants et parfois du jeûne. Certains morceaux du Gandharva Veda, le système de musique le plus ancien au monde, sont réputés être un « baume pour le cœur et la santé ».
- Une tonification de l'organisme via la prise de tisanes et minéraux.
- L'élévation spirituelle par les incantations sacrées, les mantras, les dessins mystiques et des rituels hindouistes.
- On peut aussi faire des cures de purification (Panchakarma) sous suivi médical.

L'Ayurveda cette « science de la vie » prend sa source dans les textes sacrés de l'Inde antique, mais l'expérience montre combien elle est en phase avec les découvertes médicales récentes et répond aux besoins du monde moderne.

« Tu es ce que tu manges », dit la sagesse indienne. « Ton alimentation est ta première médecine », lui répondent en écho Hippocrate, fondateur grec il y a 25 siècles de la médecine occidentale, et la pléthore actuelle de publications qui dénoncent les effets négatifs des fastfoods. Les bienfaits de l'Ayurveda sont tels que l'essayer c'est l'adopter. Passée la « phase de décrassage » qui débarrasse des ballonnements, mauvaises haleines, constipation, voire d'états d'âme perturbés, on s'abandonne au plaisir des saveurs issues d'une tradition hédoniste

sans pareille. Au-delà du contenu de l'assiette, manger est un rituel qui doit s'effectuer au calme dans un lieu agréable. Il importe de bien mastiquer et s'immerger dans la volupté des textures, saveurs, odeurs et couleurs de ce que l'on porte en bouche.

Tout en devant être adaptée à la physiologie de chacun, l'alimentation est régie par quelques principes de base. Ecouter son corps, ne manger que lorsqu'on a faim et en quantité correspondant à ses besoins. Choisir des aliments de qualité. Ménager son foie en oubliant les produits raffinés et transformés ou contenant des additifs. Faire le plein de vitamines, minéraux et antioxydants. Préférer aux conserves et plats cuisinés les céréales, les légumineuses, les fruits et légumes de saison, les graines germées, les oléagineux, le fromage frais, les yaourts nature et les huiles végétales de première pression à froid. Opter pour le bio. Réduire la consommation de viande, poissons et œufs. Ne pas réchauffer ni trop cuire ses aliments et bannir le micro-onde pour conserver les apports nutritionnels. Veiller à ce que chaque assiette comporte les six saveurs clé de la cuisine ayurvédique : astringent, acide, doux, amer, sucré et salé. Maîtriser le génie des épices : cumin, curcuma, coriandre, gingembre, piment, cannelle. Ne pas grignoter entre les repas. Finir par une tisane plutôt qu'un dessert ou café.

Autre clé de voute de cette médecine curative et préventive, les massages ou abhyanga. Ils rééquilibrent les doshas en rétablissant la circulation de l'énergie vitale (prana) perturbée par le stress, les maladies ou une mauvaise hygiène de vie. L'énergie circule à travers soixante-douze mille canaux et se concentre dans les sept principaux chakras, le long de la colonne vertébrale. Alimentés par l'énergie de tout le corps, ils la font circuler sur le principe des vases communicants.

Les massages améliorent la circulation sanguine et lymphatique, tonifient et détendent les muscles, nourrissent les tissus, renforcent les défenses immunitaires, éliminent tensions et fatigue et permettent de se reconnecter avec ses sensations. Ils sont adaptés à la prédominance des doshas et des déséquilibres du client : lents et enveloppant pour Vata, plus rapides et profonds pour Pitta, à sec pour Kapha afin de stimuler le système lymphatique. Irrésistible ! ▶

* Muriel Scibilia est auteure et ancienne fonctionnaire de la Conférence des Nations Unies sur le commerce et le développement (CNUCED).



Prevention through vaccines is better than cure

After the Covid don't forget your flu jab

The flu vaccine is preventive and well-known while Covid is reactive and uncertain. We spoke to Dr Pierre Olivier Lang from Clinique de Genolier

Julián Ginzo *

October is the window for flu vaccinations. Do we have to get the vaccine if we have already been vaccinated against Covid? What about those who will not have been vaccinated by then?

Influenza (Flu) and COVID-19 cause contagious respiratory illnesses, yet there are important differences between the two viruses and how they spread. COVID-19 is caused by infection with a new coronavirus (called SARS-CoV-2), and flu is caused by infection with influenza viruses. Both COVID-19 and the flu infections present a wide range of illnesses from no symptoms (asymptomatic) to severe disease and death. Both infections are transmitted by contact, droplets and fomites.

In contrast, antivirals and the vaccine available for influenza have no impact on COVID-19 and

vice versa. So irrespective of the individual's status with respect to COVID vaccination, it is still highly recommended to get a flu jab each year in order to prevent influenza infection.

As SARS-CoV2 immunization rises, contact barriers will fall and create opportunities for the spread of influenza viruses. The influenza vaccine is not effective at all against the COVID-19 virus.

Do you think flu vaccination should be mandatory?

There is no country in the world where flu vaccination is currently mandatory. Vaccination policies have developed over the approximately two centuries that have passed since the invention of vaccination with the purpose of eradicating disease from, or creating a herd immunity for the population that the

government aims to protect.

Vaccination advisory committees within each country are usually responsible for providing information that is used to make evidence-based decisions regarding vaccine and immunization policies. Vaccinations are generally voluntary because mandatory vaccination policies usually lead to opposition, which in turn limits the effect of immunization policies.

The current pandemic and the decades of experience concerning flu vaccines are highly illustrative of this paradox. At the general population level, the more you provide strong and good scientific information and make evidence-based decisions to intensify vaccine coverage rate through immunization policies, the more you stimulate reluctance to be vaccinated, even among very concerned populations such as healthcare workers. In my opinion, it is neither a breach of ethics nor a disservice to populations and vulnerable patients to maintain that flu vaccination should remain a personal decision based on informed consent.

The development of Covid vaccines resulted in a large part of society becoming more involved in the development processes of science. How does this affect the doctor-patient relationship?

It is true this has led some patients to look towards renowned scientists, medical professors, specialists in infectious diseases and/or policy makers, and has also helped to make patients more informed and concerned about the high complexity of taking decisions in the field of medicine. Some patients are becoming more and more proactive in their attitudes towards their own health, others are now more able to participate actively in the medical decisions that affect them, but nearly all are grateful to what scientists, healthcare workers, and policy makers have done to fight the pandemic.

This has increased patients' skills and knowledge but wrong and fake news (including that which is peddled by renowned scientists and politicians) circulates six-times more rapidly than real news and has helped befuddle their understanding of the pandemic. ▮

* Julián Ginzo is the Editorial Coordinator of UN Today.

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Les clients de Nespresso peuvent retourner leurs capsules usagées pour le recyclage dans le confort de leur propre maison

Vers des capsules de café plus éco-responsables

Les dosettes de café sont accusées de générer des tonnes de déchets. De grandes enseignes, comme le leader mondial Nespresso, développent le recyclage

Muriel Scibilia *

A l'heure où les consommateurs sont de plus en plus désireux de ne pas perturber davantage l'environnement, le recyclage a le vent en poupe. Anticipant cette tendance, Nespresso s'est lancé dès 1991 dans le recyclage des capsules de café en aluminium usagées. Ce qui lui permet aujourd'hui de se

prévaloir de disposer du système de recyclage le plus complet du secteur. Longtemps seul fournisseur de ces capsules, il compte désormais une cinquantaine de marques compatibles. D'où sa décision de mettre son infrastructure de recyclage à la disposition de la branche via la création de l'organisation à but non lucratif

Swiss Aluminium Capsule Recycling avec Delica AG. Objectif : contribuer à augmenter le taux de recyclage tout en le rendant aussi facile que possible pour les fabricants comme pour les consommateurs.

“ Le marc de café est transformé en énergie renouvelable ”

Convaincue que la meilleure approche pour augmenter les taux de recyclage est de rendre la collecte aussi pratique que possible, l'entreprise a élaboré des solutions simples : les clients peuvent bénéficier d'un service gratuit de collecte à domicile « Recycling at Home » ou déposer leurs capsules usagées dans plus de 3'700 points de collecte répartis dans toute la Suisse : boutiques Nespresso, succursales Migros, points de collecte publics, magasins d'électroménager sélectionnés et points de vente Coop.

Les capsules usagées sont ensuite envoyées dans un centre de recyclage à Moudon. Elles sont broyées pour séparer le marc de café de l'aluminium. Le marc de café est transformé

en énergie renouvelable et en engrais naturel. L'aluminium récupéré est fondu pour créer ou faire partie d'une gamme de nouveaux produits : canettes, pièces automobiles, vélos, couteaux de poche Victorinox, épluche-légumes ou stylos Caran d'Ache.

Ayant intégré l'idée que la « durabilité » passe par la mise en œuvre de normes environnementales et sociales, en 2003 l'entreprise a co-créé, avec l'Organisation non gouvernementale Rainforest Alliance, le Programme Nespresso AAA pour une Qualité Durable. Il garantit la culture d'un café de haute qualité, aide les producteurs à réduire l'impact environnemental de ce type de culture et à préserver leurs terres pour l'avenir. Il s'agit aussi d'améliorer leur bien-être.

Les caféiculteurs reçoivent une formation et une assistance technique afin de les inciter à adopter de bonnes pratiques agricoles. Nespresso travaille directement avec plus de 110 000 caféiculteurs AAA dans 15 pays et plus de 450 agronomes spécialisés les aident à améliorer la qualité de leur café et la productivité de leurs exploitations grâce à des pratiques agricoles intelligentes et durables.

“ Les clients peuvent bénéficier d'un service gratuit de collecte à domicile ”

En outre, en 2020, l'entreprise s'est engagée à rendre chaque tasse de café Nespresso, pour ses clients particuliers comme professionnels, neutre en carbone d'ici 2022. Pour atteindre cet objectif, la marque a opté pour les mesures suivantes : réduction des émissions de carbone, plantation d'arbres dans et autour des caféières où Nespresso s'approvisionne en café (compensation carbone intégrée), soutien et investissement dans des projets de compensation de haute qualité. ■



Le nouveau et premier Fixpencil fabriqué en aluminium à partir de capsules Nespresso recyclées avec une mine composée de marc de café recyclé

* Muriel Scibilia est auteure et ancienne fonctionnaire de la Conférence des Nations Unies sur le commerce et le développement (CNUCED).



L'apprentissage des enfants s'est poursuivi tout au long de l'année scolaire 2020-2021

Les écoles privées de Genève « soignent » leurs élèves

Face aux défis imposés par l'avancée de la pandémie, les écoles privées genevoises ont dû s'adapter et se réinventer

Benjamin Joyeux *

Depuis mars 2020, les écoles privées genevoises n'ont eu de cesse de s'adapter pour répondre aux nombreux défis imposés par l'avancée de la pandémie de Covid 19. Malgré leur très grande diversité, elles ont su répondre efficacement à la crise sanitaire pour offrir une continuité pédagogique à leurs nombreux élèves.

La « Genève internationale » compte 42 organisations internationales et environ 32 000 fonctionnaires internationaux, diplomates et représentants de la société civile originaires de 177 Etats. Cette population nécessite de disposer d'une kyrielle d'établissements scolaires pour

accueillir les élèves issus de familles très diverses, originaires des quatre coins du globe. En 2019, le canton genevois comptait plus de 100 000 élèves et étudiants dans l'enseignement public et subventionné pour un peu plus de 13 000 élèves dans l'enseignement privé.

Ainsi à Genève, environ 17% des élèves fréquentent une école privée, le plus haut taux de Suisse, dont les écoles internationales. Ces dernières sont très prisées des familles expatriées, offrant des programmes bilingues et multilingues permettant aux élèves d'évoluer dans un univers cosmopolite et dont au moins une langue leur étant familière.

Il y a 47 écoles privées à Genève membres de l'Association genevoise des écoles privées (AGEP), certifiées par le Département de l'Instruction Publique, de l'Information et de la jeunesse (DIP) de l'Etat de Genève. La plus ancienne, l'École internationale, a été fondée en 1924 par des pédagogues locaux et des fonctionnaires de la Société des Nations et du Bureau international du travail. Elle compte deux campus à Genève et un dans le canton de Vaud.

“ Un écosystème scolaire genevois qui est extrêmement diversifié ”

Avec un coût moyen annuel oscillant autour de 15'000 francs par enfant, ces établissements ont un prix conséquent. Néanmoins, cela ne semble pas décourager les parents. Et surtout, les origines sociales de leurs élèves sont beaucoup plus variées qu'on ne pourrait l'imaginer, si l'on regarde en détail les statistiques très instructives du DIP. Par exemple, en 2019, l'École internationale de Genève comptait parmi ses 2836 élèves, 1224 issus des catégories socio-professionnelles « ouvriers et divers » pour 887 « cadres supérieurs et dirigeants » et 725 « petits indépendants ».

L'écosystème scolaire genevois est donc extrêmement diversifié, nécessitant une gouvernance bien adaptée à chaque établissement.

A partir de mars 2020, avec l'accélération de la pandémie de Covid 19, des mesures sanitaires strictes se sont imposées dans tous ces établissements. Ils ont même dû fermer lors de la première vague, entre mars et mai 2020. Pour autant, les élèves devaient continuer d'apprendre, en suivant leurs cours en ligne. Une adaptation nécessaire qui n'est pas allée sans poser quelques difficultés comme en témoigne Michael Kewley, le directeur de la communication et référent Covid de l'École internationale de Genève : « Même si nous sommes une école privée, nous sommes tenus de respecter les règles du DIP, des règles qui étaient différentes entre les deux cantons et fonction des classes d'âge. A chaque fois il fallait s'adapter, briefier les professeurs sur ce qui était possible ou non, etc. Au début, on se réunissait tous les jours même le weekend pour gérer les réponses communes à la pandémie. »

Néanmoins, le passage au tout virtuel s'est déroulé assez facilement, précise M. Kewley : « Avant le confinement, nous avons commencé à nous préparer à un mode de fonctionnement en ligne. Tous les élèves à partir de la classe 5 ont accès à des ordinateurs et doivent avoir le leur dès la classe 7. Il faut saluer le dévouement des professeurs, car le déroulement des cours en visioconférence et en présentiel est complètement différent, ayant nécessité un changement d'approche important. »

Suite à la fermeture de deux mois en 2020, malgré un certain nombre de changements, comme le port du masque obligatoire, la généralisation des gestes barrières ou l'interdiction maintenue de certaines activités sportives et culturelles, l'École internationale de Genève a vu ses élèves revenir et semble prête pour la prochaine rentrée, car comme le souligne Michael Kewley : « Même si l'on devait repasser à l'école à distance, on a démontré qu'on savait le faire, et on le fera. »

“ L'adaptabilité a vraiment été le maître-mot de cette année ”

La plupart des écoles privées ont su s'adapter. C'est notamment le cas de l'Institut Florimont. Comme le souligne son directeur général Sean Power : « Nous avons beaucoup appris depuis un an, finalisant notre écosystème numérique, aujourd'hui parfaitement opérationnel et bien rôdé. Toutefois, il me semble qu'une leçon essentielle de cette crise reste l'importance des rapports humains. L'école, ce n'est pas seulement un lieu d'acquisition de connaissances académiques, c'est aussi un ensemble de « soft skills » que l'on développe difficilement derrière un écran : l'empathie, le dépassement de soi, l'attention aux autres... L'enseignement à distance, c'est bien mais pas tout le temps. » Pour M. Power : « L'adaptabilité a vraiment été le maître-mot de cette année. »

Que les parents soient rassurés, fidèles à leur réputation, les écoles privées genevoises et vaudoises ont à cœur d'être aux petits soins pour leurs élèves. ▶

* Benjamin Joyeux est journaliste indépendant et coordinateur Jai Jagat 2020.



A meeting of the Human Rights Council taking place in the empty Assembly Hall, Palais des Nations

NGOs reinvent themselves with Covid but fear for the future

NGOs' programmes have been severely disrupted by COVID-19, yet budgets and employment have been preserved for now, according to a recent survey of NGOs

Julien Beauvallet *

One year after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, 108 Geneva-based NGOs responded to a survey conducted in March 2021 by the International Geneva Welcome Centre (CAGI) in collaboration with the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).

Only a minority of NGOs consider the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on their operations to

be severe and to represent a significant risk for the organization for the time being. Yet results from the survey also reveal that the COVID-19 pandemic presented a range of challenges to NGOs' operational capacities, forcing them to close, scale back and adapt their programs.

Agility and online shift

Despite the challenging context, NGOs managed to

adapt and respond to growing needs by adopting new ways of working and accelerating their digitization processes. Thanks to their flexibility and resilience, Geneva-based NGOs effectively transitioned to online platforms, even reporting an increase in outreach and participation in their activities and the discussions taking place in Geneva.

This was highlighted by Ms. Lidiya Grigoreva, NGO Liaison Officer at the United Nations Office at Geneva, who noted (in a panel debate on 22 April 2021 discussing the survey's results: cutt.ly/DbWOZEx) a 10% increase in the number of NGOs accredited to UNOG in 2020 despite the inability to attend in-person meetings at the Palais des Nations.

An eagerness to return to in-person interactions

Although the relationships between international organizations and NGOs improved over time in the COVID-19 context – varying greatly among international organisations – this greater reliance on digital connectivity came at a cost of a lower impact and capacity to influence for NGOs.

It is not surprising to note that NGOs share a marked enthusiasm for resumption of in-person meetings and conferences in Geneva. While the future of International Geneva conferences and discussions is undoubtedly heading towards hybrid settings, NGOs insist that digital interactions will never fully replace in-person interactions, which are crucial for informing, sensitizing and lobbying other stakeholders of International Geneva.

“ **20% of NGOs reduced the number of staff in 2020** ”

No massive drop in revenues for the sector (so far)

Results from the survey show the different realities that NGOs had to face with regard to the impact of the pandemic on their finances. Thirty-seven percent of NGOs suffered a decrease in revenues in 2020 while a quarter experienced an increase in their revenues compared to 2019. Private donors

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CONSIDER THE
SITUATION AS POSING A
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THEIR ORGANIZATION

42% ESTIMATE THAT THE HIGHEST
DANGER IS YET TO COME

PERSPECTIVES

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What has the survey revealed?

have stepped in to support the work of NGOs – especially in the context of the response to COVID-19 – while most Governments maintained their funding levels and showed flexibility in the allocations of funds.

Unsurprisingly, however, revenues from commercial activities have dropped sharply since the outbreak of the crisis.

“ The donors’ response will be key to the sustainability of the sector ”

There were also some very critical situations for NGOs who faced a massive drop in their revenues, which jeopardized their programs and even put their existence or their presence in Geneva at risk.

Employment preserved for now

As seen in a previous impact survey conducted in May 2020, most organizations did not request or were unable to access the schemes put in place by the Swiss public authorities in the context of COVID-19.

Explanations may lie in the fact that those schemes were not adapted to the NGOs’ funding and business models and that many organizations faced an increased workload in order to address the additional needs triggered by the pandemic.

“ NGOs insist that digital interactions will never fully replace in-person interactions ”

Yet, 30% of NGOs (mainly medium and large organizations) did apply to furlough some of their staff under the Unemployment Benefit Scheme (RHT) put in place by the Swiss authorities.

Thanks to the RHT and their relatively stable budgets, only 20% of NGOs reduced their staff in 2020 and 90% plan to keep or increase their staffing in 2021. It is worth noting that a large number of NGOs are nimble, small or medium entities.

A delayed snowball effect?

In what could seem at first rather surprising, given the relatively reassuring survey results and the capacity of NGOs to adapt and remain relevant, NGOs nevertheless raised serious concerns when asked about the future, sharing a general fear that the Geneva ecosystem may be put at risk.

Given that in the past NGOs have experienced financial and national budgetary crises after a certain length of time, the donors’ response will be key to the sustainability of the sector.

The role of Geneva-based international NGOs in the near future will also be defined by the International Geneva ecosystem’s capacity to reinvent itself in this new and hybrid reality and to provide civil society actors, both in Geneva and at the local level, with the ability to engage in a meaningful manner.

The full narrative report of the survey can be downloaded on this page: www.cagi.ch/en/ngo/NGO-COVID19-SURVEY.php ▶

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