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| United NationsStaff Unions |  | Syndicats desNations Unies |

**Ban Ki-moon is Putting UN Staff at Risk – Asking for your Support**

We are writing to bring the troubling situation currently faced by the staff unions of the United Nations (UN) to your attention. On 14 June 2013, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and his management team walked out of talks with UN staff unions, removing our recognition rights in the process.

This has had the effect of ending the right of staff unions to negotiate with management, leaving both sides unable to work together to improve security, welfare and service conditions at a time when UN staff are increasingly becoming targets - in the last ten years 555 staff have been attacked, with over 200 killed.

For large numbers of UN staff this issue will directly affect their safety at work and place them at greater risk. For example, staff are now unable to negotiate for UN security officers to protect them in the field and must rely on unscreened private security companies instead. They cannot insist on bullet-proof vehicles nor on proper exit routes from office and accommodation buildings in case of terrorist attack. Indeed they cannot even negotiate an occupational safety and health policy for the UN – currently non-existent – to ensure minimum safety standards in the organization. In addition, the UN’s new mobility policy will see staff relocated to hostile locations including Afghanistan, Somalia and Iraq if they cannot find themselves a new posting three to seven years after starting in their current position.

Ban Ki-moon’s decision to remove staff unions’ recognition rights also has worrying implications for the effect on frontline delivery. Without a fully motivated and engaged staff results on the ground will change dramatically. There are currently high vacancy rates (reported in internal documents to be as high as 20 percent) negatively affecting operational effectiveness in Darfur, Afghanistan and South Sudan and may go on to affect Mali and a potential future mission in Syria.

The UN has existed for almost 70 years as an independent and inclusive organisation dedicated to preventing world wars, promoting dialogue and aiding negotiation. It has been steadfast in its mission to protect the vulnerable, promote justice and opportunity, provide resources and protection where needed and promote state co-operation.

Our work is vital and, despite the risks and threats to their welfare, thousands of skilled, committed people turn up every day to help others. From those in the field, working in highly pressurised circumstances to those at HQ doing the necessary tasks required of a global operation, each is doing their bit to make the world a more just and understanding place.

The decision to prevent UN staff unions negotiating with the Secretary-General contravenes agreed practice and directly contradicts the UN’s own recommendations to member states on good employment relations. Ultimately, the withdrawal of these rights has compromised the safety of UN staff during a period in which they are suffering higher casualties in the field than ever before.

UN staff unions are realistic and sensible organisations. We understand that change is necessary due to economic circumstances and that many countries have had to make significant budget cuts. However, it is important to be sensible about this change and understand the effect on the UN’s most valuable asset: its people. Negotiation rights do not mean unions can veto reforms as member states may have been led to believe and which may have in turn led them to support the Secretary-General in his actions. This was never the case. Staff unions only ever asked for due process and indeed, many reforms did take place in the organization with the negotiated agreement of staff unions. These include reforms related to performance management, downsizing and post reallocation as a result of budget cuts.

At a time of major organisational change, an effective framework for negotiation with staff representatives is needed more than ever, a fact recognised by the 14,000 citizens around the world who have already written to the Secretary-General in protest.

Ban Ki-moon has attacked fundamental employment rights in an organization that unions and human rights defenders from around the world look to in order uphold those very same rights. This has worrying consequences for all. If the UN doesn’t respect human rights, why should your government?

Please help us tell Ban Ki-moon he is wrong and must re-open talks with the UN staff unions now. You can do this by emailing him at bkm@un.org. Please copy any communication with Ban Ki-moon to us using the contact details below.

We also need all the help we can get to beat this attack on unions. It would be fantastic if we could get the support of your organisation and members for our campaign. Can you help? If you can please contact us.

Your actions to-date are being felt by UN management. Already, the many trades unions that have written to Ban Ki-moon and the related press coverage has led to him proposing a working group to create new rules for staff-management relations. However, the terms of reference of that group still preclude reference to re-establishing the fundamental right to collective bargaining and so it is important that we continue to campaign for our rights.

For more information on this worrying situation, we can be contacted at:

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