



United Nations Field Staff Union President

Brindisi, 3 February 2023

Ref: FSU/UNGSC/001

To: Ms Martha Helena Lopez, ASG OHR
Mr Ben Swanson, ASG OIOS

From: Mark A. Polane, President UNFSU

Subject: Allegations of harassment, abuse of authority and creation of a toxic work environment in the UN Verification Mission in Colombia.

The UN Field Staff Union (UNFSU) executive, consisting of Ms Leila Manly-Spain, Ms Liliya Galieva and myself, recently conducted a mission visit to the UNVMC mission from 28 to 30 November 2022, upon invitation by the local UNFSU Committee chairperson Mr Jairo Fernandez.

During our visit, we met with various stakeholders and key personnel, including the Head of Mission, the acting Chief of Staff, the Conduct and Discipline officer, the Chief Mission Support and various other personnel.

We also held a town-hall meeting with all staff and indicated that we were available for anyone to speak with us should they wish to have consultations with us in private.

Subsequently, we were approached by several staff who wished to speak with us in confidence regarding alleged behaviours, which they considered to be prohibited conduct by one of the mission pillar heads, the Chief Supply Chain Management, Ms Manuela de Luca.

During our discussions with various staff members, we observed major frustrations amongst staff, which they asserted was due to the toxic work environment created by Ms De Luca. In discussions with the UNFSU Chairperson of the mission UNFSU Committee, it became clear that there have been a lot of tensions among all staff, in particular following a number of anonymous reports via email, some of which also ended up in the public domain, (innercity press).

These anonymous and accusatory emails have further contributed to a distinctly mistrustful office environment and caused much anxiety among staff.





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Some of these anonymous emails were copied to us as well, some of which I had shared with ASG Swanson at the time. A recent anonymous email addressed to the UN Secretary-General was, to our surprise, acknowledged by his office and later responded to by Ms Elia Y Armstrong in terms of questions being raised about the alleged potential conflict of interest related to the Chief Conduct and Discipline and the Chief HRO of UNVMC being domestic partners with a child.

The aggrieved staff who approached us during our visit followed up our discussions by sending us a letter outlining some of their accusations, which we attach to this letter.

During our visit Ms De Luca was not in the mission, which prevented us from speaking with her directly, of note however is that there had been various interventions by the local UNFSU committee in terms of the various conflicts that have occurred in the offices of the UNVMC, which had little impact in terms of improving the situation.

We spoke with Ms De Luca on Tuesday, 24 January, to hear her side of the story. According to her, there is no wrongdoing from her side, and in fact, she levied a counteraccusation that these staff were “ganging up” on her to destroy her career by discrediting her.

We had been made aware that there have been various official complaints filed by individual staff members which had been referred back to the mission and were handled by the mission Conduct and Discipline unit. We have also been made aware that there are ongoing investigations into further accusations of wrongdoing, involving Ms De Luca and some of the complainants.

Since we are all bound by the provisions in ST/SGB/2019/8 we are hereby transmitting to you our findings, the letter sent to us levying the accusations as well as various emails and attachments shared with us by the staff concerned.

We trust that this matter will be looked into, and action taken to address any wrongdoing and efforts made to establish harmonious working conditions within the UNVMC Mission.

Sincerely.



To: Mr. Mark Polane

President FSU

From: Josefa Teresa Martinez Esteve, Chief Movcon

Isidro Duran Chief Procurement

Jaime Munoz, Chief Life Support

Thair Al-Tikriti, Chief ENG

Dear Mark,

We are writing this letter to inform you about a long ongoing situation of harassment at the workplace which has created an unbearable and hostile atmosphere in our working environment and has seriously impacted the health and well-being of UN Personnel. For more than a year now we feel we have been subjected to mobbing through intimidation, psychological abuse, offensive behaviour, and a continued lack of respect towards us and our work by our line manager, Ms. Manuela De Luca.

Reference to the ST/SGB/2019/8, this report is filed against the offender due to prohibited conduct under the following categories:

1-Abuse of authority 1.8

The offender, Ms. Manuela De Luca has created a toxic work environment in several areas of the Supply Chain and Service Delivery Pillar, affecting the health and wellbeing of many staff members, both Nationals, International and Consultants under her position as Chief SC&SD.

The number of check-outs of the affected and impacted personnel has increased tremendously with 4 International Staff and 2 National staff members leaving from Supply Chain and Service Delivery pillar MSD in the last 2 months. The number of absences due to Sick leave have also increased in various units across the same pillar. Ms. De Luca has also refused emergency leave requests to

certain unfavored staff members whilst others without proper entitlements on TJO contracts are given approval for long periods of FWA.

The unhealthy work environment has extended and impacted other pillars like the Office Resource Management. Some affected and impacted Personnel brought their complaints to the FRO of Ms. Manuela De Luca, Mr. Erich Ball. No positive changes have taken place since April and July 2022. The same affected and impacted personnel made official reports to the UNVMC conduct and discipline unit for their actions.

The offender, Ms. De Luca has extended her abuse of authority by interfering (through phone calls and her Admin personnel) at Unit Chiefs weekly meetings publicly instructing Hiring Managers, her preferences in certain recruitment processes that ended with the selection of some key UN personnel, in specific the recruitment of her administrative assistant Ms. Andrea Hernandez who has gone from an IC to Trygin to G5 in a matter of 12 months and is currently being considered for an NOB post in the Transport Unit.

Some affected and impacted Hiring managers are in fear of retaliation in case they don't adhere to Ms. De Luca's inputs over an X or Y selection process, disguising her justifications under Gender Balance and geographical representation factors (where UNVMC-MSD is in fact within an avg of 48% to 52%). She continuously overrules decisions made by Heads of Units and interferes directly in the technical aspects of the day-to-day business by by-passing the Heads of Units.

Ms. De Luca has recently recruited one P3 international staff member and implemented a new Centralized Warehouse taking posts from understaffed Units with the endorsement of Mr. Erich Ball. Ms. De Luca based those decisions on what she calls Business Processes under SCORE methodology. The subject processes are engineered by the Business Process Expert, Mr. Prince Kanago, another P3 recruited by Ms. De Luca. Mr. Prince serves Ms. De Luca as a documental platform with a clear conflict of interest as the reporting lines are direct, then Mr. Prince Kanago drafts, presents and documents it with a SCORE methodology, without taking into consideration inputs made by Unit Chiefs and other key stakeholders, then her Business Improvement Plans & processes are applied publicly, humiliating those who are not in line with her approach. After the humiliation is public knowledge, she pushes those processes through Interoffice memorandums to the CMS, Mr. Erich Ball for approval, who then

signs off on the documents and processes, that translates into unnecessary expenses that impact negatively on the image of UN and consequently to the scarce resources of the organization and UN contributing countries that are non-beneficial to the organization.

An example: The recently established Centralized Warehouse Unit is currently composed by 4 UN staff members (2 international on board 1 P3 and 1 FS4 and 2 G5 under recruitment status) while the stock inventory holdings are worth 900,000 USD... The recently established Supply Chain Performance Management Unit, composed by 1 P3 and 1 International contractor.

All the above while 3 more critically affected technical units that were already understaffed since 2016, remain further understaffed, overloaded, and weak in the service delivery area, adding another factor to the already unhealthy environment and detriment of the organization. Ms. De Luca continuously tries to manipulate recruitment processes by interfering and intimidating Heads of Units to do as she prefers when managing staffing resources. An example of the UNV posts which she unilaterally re-deploys without previous consultation with the unit chiefs. In addition to this Ms. Manuela De Luca instructs Heads of Units “to stop bringing forward the understaffing situation”. Consequently, the situation has worsened by way of further and more vigorous retaliation even outside the offices and affecting the families of some staff members.

Ms. Manuela De Luca is clearly pursuing her own personal career advancement goals within the organization and not those in the best interest of the organization and wellbeing of its staff.