

## RSC MEETING

19 MAY 2021

### MINUTES

**Participants:** Elena Haapniemi; Meray Maddah; Dan Smith; Abeer Ahmad; Alexandra Manolache; Amal Bourhrous; Alexandra Marksteiner; Andrea Gadnert; Andrea Varisco; Annelies Hekendorff; Anniek Barnhoorn; Annika Salisbury; Boulanin; Caroline Delgado; Casper Trimmer; Cecilia Bagge; Christina Ekberg; Claire McAllister; David Michel; Dylan O'Driscoll; Diego Lopes; Elin Elmgren; Elisabeth Smith; Emelie Broek; Farah Hegazi; Fei Su; Florian Krampe; Fredric Daudon; Giovanna Maletta; Ian Anthony; Jade Guiberteau; Jakob Faller; Jannie Lilija; Jenny Meldton; Ian Anthony; Jiayi Zhou; Joakim Vaverka; Joey Fox; Johanna Eliasson; Jose Alvarado; Jurg Staudenmen; Karolina Eklöw; Katongo Seyoba; Kheira Tarif; Kolja Brockmann; Kristina Tschunkert; Laura Bruun; Lena Kappelin; Louise Erdegen; Luc van de Goor; Luka Richards; Magdalena Söderqvist; Maria Kaemmerle; Marie Riquier; Marina Caparini; Mark Bromely; Martina Selmi; Nan Tian; Nikos Politis; Noel Kelly; Olle Persson; Petr Tobychakanov; Pieter Wezeman; Sepideh Soltaninia; Shannen Young; Shannon Kile; Shivan Fazil; Shourjya Deb; Sibylle Bauer; Siemon Wezemen; Simone Bunse; Elksabeth Sköns; Stephanie Blencker; Timo Smit; Ulle Hertig Nielson; Virginie Baudais; Vitaly Fedchenko; Vongai Murugani.

**Note-taker** Meray Maddah

The meeting was conducted via Zoom.

**1.** No comments on the minutes of the last meeting.

#### **2. Pandemic**

No further updates except following official measures and recommendations. Seeing the downsides of working home there could be benefits so the interest could be to work from home in the future.

In response to questions:

Dan confirmed there is no firm information about when return to the office will be possible. Hopefully, after the summer. SMT will explore possible flexibility in working from home and in the office with some kind of rotational system. SMT is also exploring refurbishment of the top floor that is currently used for storage. The working group on return to the office will be convened shortly.

#### **3. Governing Board Meeting**

Dan reported that the Board meeting on 24 and 25 May is a virtual meeting again. He expressed regret that there is no chance at the moment for the lunch meetings between Board staff members that were informative and much appreciated.

Timo Smit, as the staff observer attending the Board for the first time, reminded the RSC that he represent the staff at Board meetings so everyone's voice can be heard. Timo asked

Dan to remind the RSC about the role of the Board and requested that the last RSC meeting before the Board should in general happen with more time until the Board's meeting.

Dan agreed that the RSC should have been earlier and explained how this time its timing was caught up in a squeeze with other commitments, not least the Forum. Dan outlined the strategic and governance role of the Governing Board and its function as a testing ground for ideas. Board members have very broad networks and many researchers have benefited from this in previous times. It is quite beneficial to have a connection between the Board that is a resource to the SIPRI staff.

Joakim requested that those who intend to participate in the Board meeting as per the invitation sent out by Elena would confirm their attendance to Elena.

In response to a question, Dan said there would not be a paper on the theme of *Battlefields of the Future* to prepare for the discussion at the Board meeting. He briefly explained that the SMT has discussed the concept as the theme for this year's Stockholm security Conference, for future years' conferences and for a research programme.

Dan concluded the item by reminding the RSC about the SIPRI lecture on 24 May, delivered by Madeleine Albright, for which over 800 people have registered so far.

#### **4. &Frankly**

Dan outlined SMT's conclusions after several discussions that there are three main areas that need to be addressed:

- 1) Issue of stress that could be connected to workload and to the pandemic
- 2) Question of diversity or lack of it
- 3) Organisational culture.

SMT has produced and circulated a workplan. It is a work-in-progress and input is helpful. There will be more &Frankly surveys to be done in the future.

Joakim took the meeting through the workplan, which shows the three focus areas, concrete objectives, what type of actions can be taken and who can be involved. The aim is to take these practical steps to yield some short and long term results and improvements. SIPRI has been growing with the number of recruitments so the &Frankly survey, follow-up discussions and workplan are timely and important.

There was a rich discussion. Among the issues raised:

- The action plan seems to be more preventive than corrective. What can be done in the case of when there is discrimination and there is a form of burnout? Dan replied at the end of the discussion that the SMT is seeking structural solutions but they can and will look again at possible corrective actions that are not already covered by the staff manual.
- Recruitment can take a long time, leaving inadequate staff numbers in a team. The question was asked whether there are Swedish regulations about how long it takes to recruit. The answer is that there are not; the time taken for recruitment depends, apart

from speed of advertising, on the labour market and the length of the recruited individual's period of notice.

- The question of investment in preventive health was raised when working from home.
- In response to a question about maintaining momentum and ensuring that everyone's input is taken into consideration, Dan asked for active input, even at this meeting, including difficult questions and issues.
- There was discussion about the balance between the responsibility of the institute as a whole and the responsibility of individuals for planning, and the role of project and programme directors in ensuring good planning.
- The benefits of cross-cultural trainings were raised and the need for transparency around what can be offered in terms of professional trainings to staff members.
- The issue of the meaning of diversity and how to measure it in employment was raised. Dan responded that the survey asked how people *feel* about the matter of diversity. It was felt from some of the responses that there is an issue of inadequate diversity in recruitment processes and in the institute as a whole. There are many dimensions of diversity and discrimination and we need further discussion of them.
- There were several comments on the relationship between workload, salary coverage from project grants and planning. Several comments recognised the different needs and different funding possibilities of research teams, as well as the different pressures on the infrastructure of outreach and operations teams. One of the big issues is the expansive way that SIPRI recruited and number of publications. The operations and outreach teams need to be scaled up. Responding, Dan agreed with the need to strengthen the infrastructure for stress and workload are not only issues for researchers. Recruitment is underway for HR and finance teams. He also argued that, if SIPRI can absorb the planning process properly, it will be possible to organise finances better as well and to make a better case to donor about our needs in project financing. SIPRI has managed to strengthen some of these aspects through the Strategic Grant from the MFA. There has been a striking resistance of planning at SIPRI but it is getting easier.
- One concrete suggestion was for everyone to count how many hours are spent on core activities to have a better idea of the balance of time between fulfilling the project and undertaking other tasks within the institute.
- One comment was that there is a resistance to change in the institute. Some people resist planning and monitoring. Some team members are tightly focused on their roles and tend to forget that everyone is part of the project. Many organisations, like SIPRI, operate by projects and this is not an easy task. We should discuss how managerial work can be done better. It is crucial for the whole institute to speak the same language so better harmony at work can be achieved. In responding, Dan commented that the issue of mismatch between what one is responsible for and what one's role is came up during discussion in the SMT.
- The question was asked whether, if everybody at SIPRI works 39 hours and 45 minutes each week, as per Maconomy's timesheets, can SIPRI thrive? Dan's answer was that the working time for researchers is unregulated so that they can be flexible with their hours. If everybody works the same hours every week, output and quality will probably suffer, deadlines will be missed and so on. He also commented that, for those who work with knowledge as we do, it can be hard to count hours because thinking and reading are also productive in work terms.

- A comment was made drawing attention to the development of a vacation policy to make sure everyone is on the same page. Another point is to set objectives for oneself and to recognize that it is hard to measure what counts as work or not, due to the nature of researchers' work. Dan commented that the growth of the institute makes flexibility between clusters and programmes more possible. Some teams can now afford to "lend" one of their members to other teams.

**Closing the discussion, Dan** said it is important to see how to embrace diversity and see it as a source of strength rather than a problem to solve. He undertook to look at the workplan to see where its corrective rather than purely preventive aspects could be enhanced. However, he emphasised the importance of making sustainable, structural changes.