OCA Council Meeting 7-8 July 2007
Afghanistan 10:00 – 18:00

Present: Albertien van der Veen (chair), Joanne Liu, Mark Cresswell, Christa Hook, Tibor Sasse, Tankred Stoebbe, Max Glaser,
Guests: Jean-Michel Piedagnel, Geoff Prescott, Marilyn McHarg, Adrio Bacchetta
Minutes: Kim van Vloten

Saturday 7 July (OCA-closed session)

1. Issues on 2006 budget and reserves policy

The OCA-C chair, after consultation with the presidents of the other OCA sections had asked the Controller of the OCA to consult with the Treasurers of the various OCA section to come up with a proposal to address the current 4M financial shortfall. The reason for this initiative was that re-allocation of operational funds and reserve issues have to be approved by the Boards-in any case. The AP 2006 process had demonstrated that these issues caused considerable delays, which should be avoided. Last Monday, hence, a Teleconference was held between the treasurers and controller to meet this goal. However, it appears that the presently initiated process was not completely clear.

The paper prepared by the Controller was named ‘reserve policy’ and it appears that this created confusion, amongst others, in the OCA MT. Though the OCA president had asked to come up with suggestions to address the present 4M financial short fall, it was indeed suggested that if the controller could find a formula to address eventual future situations as well, this would be an advantage. Meanwhile, in parallel to the request of the OCA C to the Treasures and the Controller, the OCA MT was progressing towards a solution to address the current shortfall, without the OCA C being aware of this. Though the OCA MT had tried to develop an OCA reserves policy since December 2006 there was no significant progress other than what had been mentioned in the OCA MT minutes.

It appeared to be impossible to clarify during the present meeting to establish the precise account of events on the communications, which led to the TC of the Controller and the Treasurers as various factors had obviously contributed to the confusion, including unclear communication of between OCA-C chair and the Presidents to the Treasurers.

The OCA C however observes that the ensuing distress and reactions on this are out of proportion. The Council opines that there is apparently a low tolerance threshold between (the) various MT-member - the same distress could be caused by any topic. This oversensitivity needs to be addressed and the OCA-C uses the opportunity of having the four GDs to discuss this issue. The OCA-C unanimously agrees that discussing the functioning of the OCA has priority on the agenda.
2. Functioning OCA MT

In order to avail better understanding of the working relations within the OCA MT, the OCA Council proposes an open hearing session of the GD’s, without interrupting or allowing others to go into discussion or debate. In this hearing the GD’s are asked to give their frank opinion of the working relations as they experience it, their frustrations and worries, the challenges they meet and the opportunities they see for improvement.

The OCA Council does not necessarily agree or endorse whatever is stated, but will try to utilize this approach to develop a more positive dialogue between the OCA MT members and the members of OCA council on whatever issues maybe tabled. As some of the reflections of the various GD’s are sometime very personal in character, this report does not present all the individual statements made by the GD’s but rather attempt to summarize the core of the discussion.

The GDs of Canada, Germany and the UK were very critical on the management of the OCA MT and mounted a succession of complaints about processes especially, but not only, on the reserves issues and the process related to it. Many of the complaints were directed at the OCA MT Chair, though the examples were wider than that. In general the complaints of the GD’s amounted to establish that the OCA Chair is pushing his will on them. The three GD’s express their frustration on their observation that their skills and experience are not used and recognized, and specifically demand more delegation of tasks from Amsterdam.

The OCA MT chair counters this with saying that he feels that he (MSF H in Amsterdam) is responsible for the whole scope of the OCA, and opines that in his view the (GD’s of) the other sections had missed opportunities to take their share in sharing responsibility. Thus he states, in fact there has been very limited management input from the other sections to the OCA. The OCA MT Chair agrees with the other GD’s that the OCA MT requires sharing of tasks and roles other than those of the operational line. He also states that he feels he did not receive sufficient support from the other GD’s. There seem to be different interpretations of the OCA Barcelona agreement and how to work on differences. The OCA MT chair would like to see this better defined, as in his view the OCA-MT is dysfunctional, deals with details and should concentrate on strategy and issues of strategic steering and content.

As an example of a strategic process (that everyone agreed with) the entire 4M process was seen as positive by all GD’s. The OCA MT chair adds that in his view this was entirely steered and run by Amsterdam with barely any contribution of the other sections.

The OCA-MT as a whole feels bogged down in politics and operational details and questions whether this is the right model for the OCA. The OCA should be a vehicle for operations and doesn’t seem to work like this. All present GD’s detect a lack of trust instead of sharing different visions and focusing on the right issues, the OCA MT is described as “a battleground”.
From the presentations and the remarks made by the GD’s the following is observed:

- It is clear that the collaborative work relation within the OCA-MT is disrupted. This is apparently caused/exacerbated by the present structure, which is unclear and proves to be slow, inefficient and ineffective.
- The issues that cause tensions are not per se the operational or financial topics on the OCA MT agenda. It appears to be the OCA MT agenda setting and the way “non-operational” responsibilities are shared, or as some GD’s expressed – not shared.
- There is a lot of frustration on the meaning and scope of sharing responsibility.
- It appears that guidance from the OCA-C to facilitate the working relations within the OCA MT is too reactive.

The OCA-C and MT both agree that there’s a need to (re) define what is OCA and what is not. In the Barcelona agreement there are definitions of the OCA, but there’s nothing about the way of implementing it.

The OCA-C members feel that it is necessary to break the vicious circle of people feeling undervalued, leading to frustration and negatively impacting on output.

The OCA-C suggests that in view of the observed negative feelings each GD suggest ways of (self) improvement and positive recommendations for improvement of the OCA-MT functioning. According to the OCA MT Chair he could delegate more tasks and allow for others to make mistakes, and adapt his leadership style accordingly. He acknowledges the benefit of sharing responsibilities and collective responsibility. He admits, however, it will be hard for him to “allow things go wrong” as it is not in his personality, as he focused on results and success. Other GDs express that in their view things are going wrong the way it is now. The GD MSF UK would feel more valued if he would be delegated responsibility for topics that are high on the agenda of the OCA MT. The GD MSF Canada thinks that being engaged in more tasks and projects would help. The GD MSF Germany emphasizes the need for good communications and processes. Not involving people will cause feelings of disrespect and poor results.

Possible ways forward were discussed. It was agreed:

1. The OCA C suggests that the GDs could form their own forum for intersectional topics / strategic discussion, distinct from the OCA-MT meetings. It is agreed that this is one option of a future MT.
2. It is suggested that the GD MSF Canada could act as OCA MT chair during the 2-week vacation of the dedicated OCA-MT chair. The OCA C agrees unanimously.
3. It is suggested that chairing of the OCA-MT meetings (including preparation of the agenda, organisation and delivery of minutes) can rotate between OCA-MT members, as apparently already agreed within the OCA MT.
4. The September meeting of the OCA-C is planned to include a revision of the OCA. The objective is to look at strengths and weaknesses of the current model and suggest future possible models.
3. **4M**

The OCA MT chair reports that overall the 4M process improved. The 4M block week started with an overview from Logistics, HR, Finance, Operational and Medical issues. This 4M the MT members present were much more focused on strategy and able to subtract strategic issues for follow up throughout the months. The 4M process is a very heavy but necessary exercise. Geoff shares that it takes a huge amount of effort to organize this type of process, especially as the quality of it improves. He feels this is necessary for the 4M as it is the most important steering moment but that for the 8 and 12M it should be recognized that these are solely accountability moments, not steering moment and should therefore be lighter and focusing on thematic strategic discussions. For more details please refer to Geoff’s power point presentation. The only slide that raised questions was the financial reserve slide.