

Briefing to employees of the Suez group – 20 June 2006

Bipartite Committee on Equality and Diversity

In the framework of the European Works Council of Suez, following the setting up of the social Charter group in 1998 and of the Health and safety Charter group in 2002, a bipartite Committee on equality and diversity was created beginning of 2005. The initial focus of the committee was to concentrate on the following question: "Is there equality of opportunities and treatment between the men and the women in the Suez Group? "

In addition, management informed the Committee, end of 2005, about two management-led working groups that had been set up to discuss equality and diversity: a working group focusing on diversity (e.g. ethnic minorities) and another one composed of women managers from France and Belgium.

The Equality and Diversity Committee has now met 6 times including trade union representatives from Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Norway, Belgium and France, thereby integrating a multicultural dimension, who reached the following conclusions:

1. Due to a lack of detailed gendered data on the situation, Suez is not in a position to show whether or not there are discriminatory practices and policies in terms of recruitment, promotion, remuneration, training and restructuring. The absence of data is a central obstacle that needs to be overcome to achieve equality and diversity at the workplace.
2. Accordingly, the Committee's union delegates have drawn up an equality action plan, which was discussed with management, with a view to identifying, rectifying and preventing all forms of discrimination.
3. The action plan proposes to carry out an annual equality audit covering all working conditions in order to provide a snapshot of the situation. To this effect a checklist on data collection was drawn up to support the equality audit. In addition, the action plan calls for a qualitative survey on a targeted number of Suez plants to collect your views and first-hand experiences. An external expert appointed jointly by the unions and management should carry out this survey.
4. On this initial basis, we will be able to develop appropriate instruments to achieve equal opportunities and treatment. We are all aware of the difficulties working women are facing, notably their under-representation in decision-making positions and slow career development (glass-ceiling). This is why a statement of intent will not be enough. We seek to ensure that the fundamental right to equality, as recognised both at national and EU levels, is fully respected and that new rights, to the benefit of both women and men, can be further developed.
5. At the last Committee meeting of 7 June 2006, management informed the trade union delegates of its unilateral decision to draw up a document summing up our conclusions as well as those of the two other management-led working groups. This document should be submitted for consultation to the Committee. While this document can be a step in the right direction, we don't think it will do justice to our findings and proposals as discussed over the past 15 months. Further, in sharp contrast with the other two working groups, our Committee represents Suez employees and not just management.

6. It is about time to redress difficult situations and reform ill-suited work organisation including a monitoring role for trade unions coordinated by the Committee at the Group level. It is this very challenge that our action plan seeks to take up. It will not only help identify measurable objectives and appropriate resources to redress inequalities, including the gender pay gap, but also it should be a tool to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past.