



**Staff Union**  
of the International Labour Organization

**Syndicat du personnel**  
de l'Organisation internationale du Travail

**Sindicato del personal**  
de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo

15 November 2018

**Statement by the Chairperson of the Staff Union Committee to the Programme,  
Financial and Administrative Section of the Governing Body  
(334th Session – 30 October 2018)**

Mr Chairperson,  
Mr Director-General,  
Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Governing Body,  
Dear colleagues,

It is an honour to address you today as the elected Chairperson of the Committee of the ILO Staff Union, which represents approximately 70 per cent of staff at headquarters and in the field. This is, as always, a valuable opportunity for me to share some observations on industrial relations in the Office, the morale of staff and their position on items featured on the Governing Body's agenda.

The last time I addressed you, in March 2018, my statement, which I have reread, was ultimately imbued with the staff's great hope and faith. They hoped – and were even convinced – that the ILO would be true to its almost century-long commitments, values and principles and would overcome the obstacles and challenges that it then faced. Thanks to the Organization's unique tripartite structure, the staff had no doubt that it would remain the spearhead, the model, the final bulwark against the unceasing attacks against the international civil service within the United Nations common system. It seemed evident that the ILO would be able to breathe into the massive reform taking place within the United Nations system the very special breeze of social justice and dialogue, which only our Organization has been able to promote down the decades.

Instead of that refreshing breeze, which could have been synonymous with new inspiration, clouds gathered until the storm broke. More than seven months on, the staff still cannot understand those decisions, which have had both internal and external repercussions. Of course, the ILO Staff Union leaves it to the Governing Body and its members to deal with the external consequences. It has enough to do internally since the damage has been significant. The dispute has not been resolved and so there has been an aftermath. The motivation and morale of the troops are not at their highest, as the saying goes, but the work is being done because the staff continue to be professional, despite the challenges. Neither are they really in the mood for

festivities. What do the ILO staff have to celebrate? The continual deterioration of their working and employment conditions despite their unwavering commitment and that of their predecessors down the years? The attack on their status as international civil servants? Their increasing precariousness? A future of work that to them seems dangerously like the past? We can only repeat, time and time again, that an organization cannot function without its staff, but the staff also need to receive all the care that they deserve so that their motivation and commitment can best serve the aims and activities for which they were recruited, even in highly difficult international circumstances where multilateralism is keeping a low profile.

The staff never light-heartedly enter into a dispute, confront their management head-on during unpleasant public meetings and decide to go on strike. They do it to defend their most basic rights when they consider these to have been flouted. The staff is currently in a phase where anger has given way to a relatively neutral, temporary state of waiting. I challenge anyone in this assembly who wants to criticize my colleagues in the Professional category at headquarters for their lack of enthusiasm when they have just lost one tenth of their salary on the basis of calculations that are, let us recall for the umpteenth time, biased. I challenge anyone who wants to criticize for the same reasons my colleagues in Bangkok, New Delhi or Santiago who have had double or triple salary scales imposed even though they are performing precisely the same duties and work. The calculated indifference of the United Nations Office of Human Resources Management coupled with the arrogance of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) regarding these salary-related issues continue to be unacceptable to the staff. The dispute is now in the judges' hands, and I will enter into more detail on this matter later in my statement.

Industrial relations have, of course, changed. This has been characterized by the lack of a formal framework for social dialogue between the Office and staff representatives; when dialogue has taken place, it has tended to be informal. Without doubt, staff representatives and our colleagues from human resources, to whom we pay tribute, have demonstrated pragmatism and commitment in ensuring that routine questions are settled and that staff employment and working conditions do not deteriorate further. However, informality and ad hoc agreements to resolve problems will never be a substitute for meetings of the Joint Negotiating Committee, a formal framework in which the social partners' principles and positions are discussed and collective agreements are signed, and which is the natural forum for collective bargaining to achieve its full potential. The absence of formal dialogue has also sometimes been reflected in the rather eccentric initiatives emanating from some departments, of which certain results and recommendations feature in the documents submitted to you for information this morning, without any real formal consultation of staff representatives in advance. One of the most significant consequences has been the notable standstill or slowdown in negotiations on crucial matters such as contract policy, the classification of jobs in the field and the reopening of discussions on amending certain collective agreements.

Let us now come to the essence of the matters which you are discussing during this session, ladies and gentlemen, members of the Governing Body. I will dwell specifically on the paper on the United Nations reform (document GB.334/INS/4), and in that connection on the preliminary overview of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2020–21 (document GB.334/PFA/1), on the proposed amendments to the Statute of the ILO Administrative Tribunal (document GB.334/PFA/12/1) and, lastly, as you might expect, on the update on matters relating to the ICSC (document GB.334/PFA/13(Rev.)).

In respect of the reform of the United Nations system, the staff, and especially those working most closely with the constituents, have high hopes that this session of the Governing Body will at last deliver a clear vision of their future and the substance of their work. My colleagues are very concerned for various reasons.

First, these two papers, the one on the programme and budget proposals and the one on the reform, contain such massive contradictions and blatant uncertainties, with all the potential ramifications for the staff that on reading them the staff representatives wondered whether they were becoming schizophrenic. It would seem that in this matter theory is colliding with practice: many colleagues in the field have told us that UN directives aiming to implement the reform quickly at their duty stations are already on the point of being applied while they at the ILO are still waiting for guidance from the Governing Body on what position to take concerning the reform. This is by no means an easy situation for them. It was only last week that one of our colleagues, a programme officer working in the field, asked me the following question: "What we'd like to know, and soon, is if and when we're going to take the reform train. And if we do take the train, what class will we be in? First class or the freight wagon?"

The staff representatives wonder whether the ILO, for the second time this year, will fly in the face of its century-old values and principles in its response to demands that, in their view, have perhaps more to do with economic and financial matters than a real pooling of the diverse competencies of the specialized agencies with a view to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

Second, the staff seem to be almost absent from the considerations arising from document GB.334/INS/4. They appear to be an insignificant commodity that can be moved about depending on what decisions, if any, are taken. But I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, members of the Governing Body: is yet another review of the ILO's external structure and staffing arrangements insignificant for the staff? Is the prospect of a dual hierarchy that adds Resident Coordinators to Regional Directors insignificant for the staff? Are the sharing of premises in the field, the radical transformation of administrative departments and the uncertainty over the status of national coordinators really insignificant for the staff? Don't all the implications of this reform for ILO staff, who still don't know if, when and how it will take place in practice, deserve deeper and more carefully weighed consideration that is a shade more respectful of the men and women who strive daily to ensure that the Organization functions effectively?

For the record, the ILO staff recall that "work is not a commodity"; this applies equally within the ILO, even in documents submitted to the Governing Body. They call for all the appropriate consultation and negotiation mechanisms to be used sufficiently in advance and for these to be clearly indicated in documents submitted to the Governing Body.

I will now touch on the paper on the ILO Administrative Tribunal (document GB.334/PFA/12/1). The staff representatives are surprised that the proposed amendments affect only the Statute and are, accordingly, incomplete. While recognizing the vital importance of maintaining the Tribunal's independence by all means and the imperative need to consult the staff representatives of organizations that no longer wish to recognize the Tribunal's jurisdiction, the Staff Union is surprised at the absence of the other proposed amendments submitted, at the request of the ILO Office of the Legal Adviser, by all the staff of the

organizations and their representative federations, especially in the current situation where 800 salary-related complaints are going to be examined.

I come lastly to document GB.334/PFA/13(Rev.), which provides an update on matters relating to the review of the post adjustment system by the ICSC and the implementation of the revised post adjustment index for Geneva.

The staff representatives wish to say firstly that they consider that these questions have still not received an adequate response. The dispute is therefore continuing through legal action before the ILO Administrative Tribunal since more than half of staff members concerned have lodged a complaint against the illegal decision taken by the Governing Body in March 2018, jointly with their colleagues from other specialized agencies which belong to the ILO Administrative Tribunal and those who have lodged appeals with the United Nations Dispute Tribunal. In this respect, hearings have recently taken place before that United Nations Tribunal, during which the highly instructive testimony of witnesses has shown yet again how deeply dysfunctional and partial the ICSC is, which could seriously damage the reputation of the United Nations common system.

The dispute will also continue through political and administrative action since the ILO staff, through their union, will do everything to ensure that the governance and operating arrangements of the ICSC can be improved as soon as possible.

In a point for decision in March 2018, the Governing Body requested the Office to actively engage with the ICSC with the objective of reforming salary survey methodologies, with the full involvement of the representatives of United Nations workers' federations. The Union confirms that progress has been made on the purely technical point of revising salary methodologies and that meetings, of which the terms of reference were decided in consultation with staff representatives, will take place soon. If everything goes well, the findings of these meetings will be submitted to the next session of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ). The associations and unions of the United Nations system appreciate the joint efforts made by the administrations in this highly technical and statistical area.

In contrast, the ILO Staff Union is much more doubtful about the commitment of the administrations, and especially of the ICSC, to the review of the Commission's consultative process and working arrangements, a process which should in the medium term lead to a real social dialogue mechanism within the United Nations. It is obvious why the staff representatives are requesting that this aspect be treated as a matter of priority: any technical improvements in salary-setting methodology will be futile if the consultation mechanism remains the same and if the ICSC retains the authority to make a decision alone in splendid isolation when the parties disagree, as has been the case over recent years. Can the ILO and the United Nations afford the luxury of being in permanent dispute with their staff, especially against a backdrop of reform and difficult international circumstances? How long will they continue to support a commission that does not comply with the elementary criteria of ethical conduct, independence and diversity? The same goes for the Organization's credibility: the ILO cannot, on the one hand, pride itself on its uniqueness, values and principles when it debates the reform of the United Nations system and the future of work in the context of its Centenary celebrations and, on the other, disregard

those same principles when it comes to social dialogue and justice for the staff within the United Nations system itself.

In respect of the point for decision of document GB.334/PFA/13(Rev.), the Union notes that there have been several amendments since this morning, which demonstrates that there is definite interest in this topic. It is important for the staff that this question is followed up by the Governing Body. The Union therefore requests the Governing Body that this issue be placed on the agenda for the March 2019 session – I would even say as a matter of priority.

The ILO staff representatives, like those of other organizations in the United Nations system, are undoubtedly pragmatic and constructive, but they are not completely stupid. They consider that the meetings mentioned in paragraph 9, which should take place between the ICSC, administrations and staff representatives before the end of December 2018, are the last chance and a review is needed if a stalemate is reached. Moreover, you, ladies and gentlemen, members of the Governing Body, need to know the eventual number of complaints lodged with the Tribunal.

The staff representatives are certain that if no tangible improvement ensues from these meetings, the staff federations, including the ILO Staff Union, will have to take every measure necessary to ensure their demands are met and that employment conditions are set by a credible, responsible and accountable body, in accordance with the fundamental principles of social dialogue.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, members of the Governing Body, this time which should have been a moment of grace for the Organization, a shared moment of intense celebration, has been considerably tarnished by significant worries and many uncertainties faced by my colleagues.

The staff have always shown deep commitment and, let's not be afraid to say it, love for this unique institution in the world whose aims remain not only as noble but, above all, just as relevant 100 years after its creation. This Organization is also 100 years multiplied by all the years worked by men and women in the service of those aims. They deserve your respect and care. I am convinced that the staff, whom I represent, will be determined in 2019 to ensure that our Organization shines its light from its rightful place, despite all the difficulties encountered this year, because sometimes it is necessary to exceed our own limits for a greater cause. The staff simply hope that all the stakeholders in this Organization will do the same.

Thank you for your attention.

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