



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

Statement delivered

**On the occasion of the launching of the 100th anniversary celebrations of the ILO,
Colonnade hall, 22 January 2019 (delivered in French)**

Secretary of State for the Economy, Madam Ambassador, Ambassador of the Swiss Confederation, President of the Council of State of Geneva, President of the Grand Council of Geneva, Mayor of Geneva, President of the Foundation for Geneva,

President of the Governing Body, Officers of the Governing Body, Director-General, Deputy Director-Generals,

Dear colleagues,

- It is a signal honour for me today to speak to you as the representative of the staff on the occasion of the official launching of the 100th anniversary celebrations of an Organization to which we are so deeply attached. I do so with considerable emotion, as well as with a justifiable pride in my duty to pay tribute to the commitment of my colleagues to the ILO.
- Indeed, one might well ask what might become of an Organization such as ours – however prestigious and venerable it may be – were it not for a highly committed and competent secretariat and staff to keep it going on a daily basis.
- At this very first commemorative event of the year I prefer to leave it to those who are better informed than I to speak of the usefulness, the purpose and the Great History of our Organization, but in my own capacity I cannot pass up the opportunity to draw attention to the vast accumulation of personal and personnel experience that, in the final analysis, constitutes the collective memory of this International Labour Organization of ours.
- On this memorable occasion, and with great humility, my thoughts go first and foremost to the three women (Ms Laverriere, Ms Sanger and Ms Huet) and 10 men (Mr Butler, Mr Phela, Mr Di palma, Mr Thudichum, Mr Thommen, Mr Pône, Mr Martin, Mr Peloux, Mr Kasler and Mr Michelet) who, following the 1919 Washington Conference, were confirmed by the Director-General, Albert Thomas, as the first titular officials of the International Labour Office. One of their number, who was still of this world when he attended the ILO's Jubilee 50 years ago in 1969, confided in us just how heroic and uncertain those days were, when *"it is well-nigh impossible to imagine the depths of ignorance and mutual misunderstanding in which everyone wallowed, doing their best, though, in their national fashion"*. *"Doing their best"* ... such was the hallmark of the international civil service at the time. Since then, the joyful cacophony of the Organization's formative years and the different ways of operating gradually evolved over the years into the well-ordered United Nations common system of

today. True pioneers as they were, our predecessors may well have found it hard to believe that, all these years later, the same system's lack of flexibility – however useful in its way – would from time to time be a cause of major concern for the first of the UN's agencies and for its staff.

- On this memorable occasion, I cannot but pay tribute to those who first came up with the idea of an internal social dialogue and who in 1920, barely a year after the creation of the ILO, decided upon their own authority to organize a general assembly that was to lay the foundations of a Staff Union which, for the past 99 years, has established itself as an important administrative and political force exercising its influence on the working conditions and career prospects of each and every official of the International Labour Office.
- On this memorable occasion, I salute the countless men and women - whether they are active or retired or have already passed away - who have served this Organization, be it for three days, for three months, for three years or for three decades.
- On this memorable occasion, my thoughts go out especially to all those men and women who have paid with their lives in the performance of their duties in order to defend the values and principles of the Organization.
- Lastly, on this memorable day I wish to express my sense of solidarity and deep affection for all our colleagues in the Field and at the Turin Centre who, because they are engaged all over the world in work that may be both precarious and dangerous but where the ILO's presence is essential and will always remain so, are unable to attend this ceremony in person.
- There you have it, ladies and gentlemen. If I have spoken at too great a length, I am comforted by the thought that 100 years of commitment by the staff to decent work and to social justice are well worth five minutes of your time.
- On behalf of the Staff Union, I wish the Organization a joyous hundredth anniversary. Long live the ILO!

Catherine Comte-Tiberghien
President
ILO Staff Union