



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

24 November 2015

**Statement by the Chairperson of the Staff Union Committee to the Programme,
Financial and Administrative Section of the Governing Body
(325th Session – 2 November 2015)**

Madam Chairperson,
Ladies and gentlemen members of the Governing Body,
Dear colleagues present today,

I again have the honour and pleasure to address you today as Chairperson of the ILO Staff Union, which represents 70 per cent of the staff working at headquarters and in the field.

The purpose of my statement is, as usual, to inform you of the views or concerns of ILO staff members about the decisions that you, members of the Governing Body, will take in this or in other forums.

In the current month of November 2015, there are several concerns occupying the minds of ILO staff members.

The document on the workload and effectiveness of the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO (GB.325/PFA/9/1 (Rev.)) first caught our attention. The Staff Union was consulted, along with other staff associations and unions, before the presentation of this document; the Union is grateful to the Office of the Legal Adviser for taking this approach as part of a healthy consultation process. First of all, the Staff Union would like to recall that this institution is a basic guarantee for ILO employees because their place of work enjoys immunity from legal process and they cannot turn to the national courts when disputes arise concerning their terms and conditions of employment. In fact, when members of staff are faced with a sense of injustice, unfair treatment, and possibly harassment, having exhausted all internal remedies available in their organization, they must be able to turn to a legal body with the level of effectiveness and quality of decision-making to reassure them that their case, their workplace problem, has received close attention, and that a decision will be made objectively by persons with unquestionable expertise in employment rights. What matters to ILO staff is that this Tribunal can today maintain this quality of decision-making, which has contributed significantly

to its reputation, and improve its services in the future, when there will be an exponential increase in the number of appeals. Furthermore, looking to possible improvements, the employment stability of staff working in the Tribunal as an essential prerequisite for the independence of any judicial institution, and the possibility for complainants to take part in joint legal proceedings, are major priorities for the ILO Staff Union.

I am not going to comment on or analyse in any detail the current status of the Tribunal but, that said, I will make a general observation that the issue of social dialogue and collective bargaining in international organizations is at the very heart of the problem. If, in some organizations, social dialogue is absent, if consultation and collective bargaining are not in place, if the voices of staff are not heard in formal labour relations settings, then these members of staff will have no other option but to assert their rights through legal means, and in some cases to take mass action.

As for the ILO Staff Union, I repeat it will, of course, be willing to discuss when the time comes any possible future improvements that would not only help maintain the quality of decision-making and independence of this Tribunal, but also to explore all possible solutions to ensure its effectiveness and continuity.

I would now like to report to you, from the staff's viewpoint, on the status of labour relations in the Organization since my statement in March, by raising a few key issues.

You have had the opportunity to familiarize yourself with the update on the internal reform set out in document GB.325/INS/15/1, including the aspects relating to the progress of the review of administrative processes carried out with support from external consultants, as well as with the field operations and structure review. If I had not been a staff representative in this Organization, I would have been pleased, when reading this document, to see how all those review stages appeared to have been completed with disconcerting ease, transparently, and in a consultative atmosphere that seemed to have unashamedly reached an ideal level of social dialogue.

Of course, the staff representatives note with satisfaction that, in effect, engaging in social dialogue on an almost daily basis has provided some favourable outcomes that have satisfied both parties. That was the case on certain subjects such as the transfer of the Abidjan Regional Office, the restructuring of some departments and technical cooperation programmes, individual conflict resolution, the progress of the building renovation and improved building security, as well as the working groups set up to improve our health insurance fund.

However, critical gaps remain in the labour relations institutional framework, which means that the staff representatives cannot show the same complacency that we see expressed in this document.

The reform has hardly been a bed of roses for staff members, as they have the unpleasant impression that they are now in a constant state of reform and that some reform-related decisions are far less anodyne than the impression given by the management when they were first proposed. A case in point is the review of administrative processes: while it was launched

on the pretext of simplifying administrative work, it is now turning out to be a major organizational reform, which will undoubtedly have much more significant implications in terms of governance and will inevitably have an impact on staff.

In my statement in March 2015, I already referred to the absolute need for upstream consultation with staff representatives so that this exercise does not fall into the same traps that it has previously and so that it has a chance of success. I was optimistic and naively had the impression that I had been heard. Unfortunately, the first few months were chaotic in terms of social dialogue: to begin with, there was no formal upstream consultation with representatives to discuss the key steps that were planned, the final goals, the working methods and the potential impact of this exercise on the staff. Moreover, turning to external consultants, especially a notorious firm known above all for advising large companies on their social plans, has led to a communications policy that had been quite some distance from, if not the polar opposite of, the terminology traditionally used in our Organization. However, it would appear that, following a number of specific steps taken by the Union, a very recent change of attitude on the management side leaves room to hope for better days where communication is concerned. It is the kind of consultation that staff members will never take lightly, because it is about their duties and because they are best placed to discuss how to make improvements in that regard.

I must let you know that the field structure review featured in the same report has not been a model example of how to consult with staff either. Now that the review is more or less complete, it will be important for staff representatives once again to become closely involved – in advance rather than retrospectively – in the final stages of its implementation. The post classification exercise currently taking place on the ground is part of this final phase and is already generating a large number of questions from our colleagues. They would like the process to remain true to the initial demands they made in 2010 during the staff engagement phase, and to respect the agreement signed by both management and the Staff Union.

In light of what has happened this year, the Staff Union notes that social dialogue has not been entirely successful and that significant progress still needs to be made, including through this formal dialogue, but also in terms of respecting previous agreements, acknowledging the need for consultation and ensuring equal access to the information needed for future negotiations. If we are to avoid needlessly wasting the Organization's time, then we must treat this as a matter of urgency. In their most recent message to staff, senior managers celebrated the benefits of social dialogue to mark the achievements of the winners of the Nobel Prize in the past two years. The Staff Union would say in response that it is also essential to practise more consistently and coherently within the Organization the things that we are proud to bring to those outside it. In fact, both sides have a responsibility and a historic opportunity to demonstrate to the world that any reform is possible, not in spite of social dialogue but because of it. Just two weeks ago, Staff Union members met at their global meeting and reaffirmed the vision that they should be driving the process of transforming the ILO into a better workplace, as well as representing all staff as an equal and robust social dialogue partner. The Union is ready to fulfil its side of that bargain.

Before turning to the wider issue of conditions of service in the international civil service, I would like to refer once again to the concept of a single ILO and the effective integration of the work of the Turin Centre into the ILO's broader strategies. The Staff Union would once again like to lend its support to the demands made by the Staff Union of the Turin Training Centre, so that the career development of staff at both organizations can be viewed without distinction in terms of recruitment, promotion and tenure. Achieving that would send a strong and encouraging signal.

I now turn to the major issue of concern facing staff at the Organization and all their colleagues from other United Nations organizations.

You are no doubt aware that, at the request of the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly of the United Nations, a review of remuneration packages within the international civil service has now been running for two years at the International Civil Service Commission. The General Assembly is shortly to take a decision on the basis of the Commission's recommendations; those recommendations have already had a very negative impact on all staff concerned.

Distinguished delegates, the proposals were made on the pretext of simplifying the remuneration system. But in fact, the final decisions made during the summer have proved, in the end, to be toxic in a number of ways for the organizations and staff they employ; those decisions are ultimately turning into a pay cut which, moreover, affects the different categories of staff most unfairly.

There have been more than two years of discussions with the management of those organizations and representatives of international federations speaking for all international civil servants,

All the specialized agencies including those with a strong presence in the field have been strongly encouraged to take drastic measures to promote staff mobility,

Incentives have been put in place to attract young people to work in humanitarian affairs,

And after all that, the Commission then proposes remuneration and benefits package that equates to a 10 per cent pay cut.

Taken together, these proposals primarily affect our colleagues who want to work in hardship locations, who are in single-parent families – and so by implication, women; and they clearly target young staff members with family responsibilities.

What is most shocking is that one of the proposals involves a 6 per cent increase in salaries for directors who are mainly based at the headquarters duty stations.

All these measures have provoked an angry response from all United Nations staff and generated an unprecedented campaign, the culmination of which is to be held in New York in the coming weeks. More than 10,000 members of staff have signed a petition that staff federations will deliver by hand to the UN Secretary-General; they are determined to defend

their conditions of service as they were legitimately defined when the United Nations was established.

Distinguished delegates, while the contributor countries which you come from are mostly aware of the challenges facing the United Nations and its specialized agencies, it is the agencies which have a duty to invest in their most valuable asset: the men and women who work there. Indeed, the agencies require committed staff around the world with the best skills; they must make it their duty to attract such people when young and retain them when they have become more experienced with a salary and benefits package and a level of job security commensurate with their qualifications and in line with the principles on which the organizations they serve were founded from the very beginning; that will allow those men and women to accomplish the tasks that contributor countries assign them during the sessions of their executive boards – tasks which, let us not forget, are sometimes done under life-threatening conditions.

Undermining the staff of the United Nations is certainly not a good way to celebrate with dignity the Organization's 70th anniversary that took place last week.

On the contrary, the anniversary should be an opportunity to acknowledge and recognize all the work that the staff members have done since the establishment of this noble institution of global governance, and to provide it with motivational incentives for the future that will allow it to best achieve its objectives.

Thank you for your attention.
