



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

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Statement by the Chairperson of the Staff Union Committee to the Programme, Financial and Administrative Section of the Governing Body

(326th Session – March 2016)

Madam Chairperson,
Mr. Director-General,
Ladies and gentlemen members of the Governing Body
Dear colleagues and everyone else present today,

I 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 this regular exercise is to inform you of the staff representatives' stance on a number of the senior management's recommendations which have an impact on all staff members' employment and working conditions.

Generally speaking, this process presupposes the existence of social dialogue within the Organization and the holding of discussions, consultations, or even negotiations, prior to sessions.

But today, in my capacity of staff representative, my number one problem concerns document GB.326/PFA/4 on the after-service health insurance.

First, this document was debated yesterday evening before the Staff Union could express its opinion. The flukes in the organization of the PFA section's agenda are probably very useful, especially when it comes to muzzling the staff.

Secondly, contrary to the disconcertingly confident assertion I heard yesterday evening, which almost knocked me sideways, there was no proper consultation on this matter with the staff representatives. I can assure you of that.

As everything possible has been done to gag her, the staff representative therefore regrettably has no option but to inform you today, after the fact, of her position on this matter and on the draft decision which you have already approved. What a fine example of social dialogue within the ILO!

The proposals contained in this document are crucial for the durability and future of the social security system of ILO staff. But some of them conflict with the fundamental principles of social security and, what is more, encourage the exploration of funding possibilities which the staff find totally unacceptable. These possibilities, which are mainly contained in paragraph 39(b) of the decision will lead to discrimination in terms of age and nationality and flout the principle of solidarity between generations and between the sick and the healthy, which forms the basis of social insurance systems. They also ignore the fact that employers' contributions are deferred wages and they go against headquarters agreements making organizations' exemption from national social security schemes subject to the guarantee they will provide at least equally favourable arrangements for their staff. In short, the most attractive aspect of these allegedly risk-free possibilities is that they shift the financial burden to staff by excluding from the social protection system some of its retired policyholders who are the most expensive and by simply making them fodder for greedy private insurance companies. It is a well-known fact that national schemes will not insure people over a certain age who have never even contributed to them.

My concluding comment on this document, on which I am dwelling although its fate is already sealed, is that the Staff Union has taken due note, although this is not expressly stated in the decision as adopted, that any further decision on this subject must be accompanied at the very least by genuine consultations with the staff. As I have not heard any real commitment from the senior management in this respect, I hope that it will remember the debates which took place here yesterday. Otherwise I will make a point of reminding it, when the time comes.

So today the Staff Union is asking itself two questions:

Can it continue to believe its Director-General's assurances that consultation and collective bargaining will always constitute the cornerstones of internal social dialogue when a document of such importance to the staff has not even formed the subject of consultations?

Must it infer that the fundamental principles related to social security which are promoted by the Organization do not apply to its own staff?

By way of a reminder, the international civil service is in a separate category to other civil services and, under their constitution and Article 101 of the Charter of the United Nations, agencies in the United Nations system have a duty to provide their officials with universal social coverage. This coverage is now being assailed on all sides. The ILO Staff Health Insurance Fund is bearing the brunt of more than erratic administration in the past and of a lack of decision-making and good governance, which could already have wrecked it on more than one occasion in the past. But, as the French proverb goes, if you want to drown your dog, accuse him of

having rabies. I can assure you that at the moment the staff are rabid with anger. Anger over not receiving services and benefits commensurate with its contributions, anger over receiving reimbursement after periods of time bordering on the unacceptable, anger, especially among field staff, over not being able to be hospitalized because they have no adequate proof that they are insured, anger because staff decision-making power in the SHIF Management Committee has been deliberately whittled away over the years.

So, even if, in response to a working group's recommendations, the Director-General recently promised to employ sufficient human, technical and financial resources to enable the Fund to function properly, these improvements are coming at a very late stage and are hardly convincing our colleagues, especially those in the field, who are covered by this insurance. The staff expect deeds not just words, because this is an emergency.

This fund has existed for many years and the staff demand that everything possible be done to ensure its durability and efficiency by improving its governance and administration and they hope that the decisions which you took yesterday will go in the right direction rather than lead to its ruin.

For unfortunately the Staff Health Insurance Fund is not the only wrong from which officials are suffering today. The situation of our recently retired colleagues is scarcely any more brilliant. For about a year now, they have had to wait for an average of four to six months before they receive the first instalment of their pension. I ask you, ladies and gentlemen of the Governing Board, who can afford to wait for between four and six months, before they get their pension? The reason given, the move to new software, cannot be the full explanation. We have been informed by staff of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund that there are serious governance problems and insufficient funds to ensure that it functions properly.

You can well understand that the staff is very worried by this situation and by this onslaught on its social protection which is constantly undermining its acquired rights and which, over the years, has meant that it is bearing an increasingly heavy financial burden while excluding some members from its benefits in the future. The men and women whom I represent, serving officials or current or future retirees, will not put up with this and the action which we are now taking within the ILO or in federations of staff unions and associations forms part of the counteroffensive and will continue.

Allow me now to move on to another matter, the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO, which forms the subject of a draft decision.

Document GB.326/PFA/12/1 attracted the keen attention of the staff representatives. The staff takes note of the explanations regarding article II of the Statute of the Tribunal which gave rise to some concern on the part of the staff associations and unions of other organizations. The very idea that some complainants might find themselves out in the cold, if the Tribunal were to decide no longer to accept complaints in respect of some organizations which do not meet the criteria of having effective internal remedies, is disquieting. If further

discussions were to be held, the viewpoint of all organizations' staff unions and associations should again be heard.

As for the repeal of article XII, while we understand the reasons given, namely that it is anachronistic and fails to guarantee equality of access to justice, we nevertheless raise the fundamental issue of appellate review which is an essential aspect of the right of defence in judicial procedure today. Even if the proposed amendments to article VI constitute welcome progress, they provide only a partial remedy to this problem.

Furthermore, and to echo what I have already said in my November 2015 statement on this matter, a revision of the Tribunal regulations would certainly contribute to the modernization of that venerable institution; a revision on which the staff associations and unions have already submitted several proposals that, for the time being, have been left aside. The ILO Staff Union joins with the urgent calls of its peers from other organizations for a major individual and collective consultation, involving all stakeholders, to take place without delay.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, I turn to document GB.326/PFA/11, which reports on the Human Resources Department's strategy for 2010–15. It is a document that assesses the past five years and the staff representatives are duty-bound to inform you of their views.

For those who remember it, the year 2010 did not start well. It was a time when the administration still thought a coffee on the tenth floor of the building sufficient to quiet the legitimate concerns of staff representatives who had come from all over the world. This was an event that led to the mobilization of ILO staff on a scale not seen for many years.

Fortunately – for the Organization and its staff – many changes have taken place. Progress has been made on internal labour relations, yet the problem of the lack of consultation on document GB.326/PFA/4, which we take most seriously, leads us to revise our satisfaction index downwards and encourages us to bolster our vigilance, particularly in view of future negotiations on the contracts policy. There are still departments at the heart of the Organization that appear fully impervious, if not resistant, to the culture of social dialogue. That must change.

The Department of Human Resources, in drafting its report, passes rather quickly over the fact that the past five years have been a period of relentless reforms, both within and outside the Organization, under the framework imposed by the International Civil Service Commission. The staff have frequently had questions about the sequence and coordination of these reforms and also about their purpose, since they have, in large part, not met their expectations. These reforms are copied from the private sector and are not adapted to international organizations' mandates. Moreover, economic constraints are taking them further and further away from the founding constitutional principles of these organizations. Reform on the range of provisions of the International Civil Service Commission adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, which was originally intended to simplify matters, has –

unsurprisingly – been turned into an exercise in duly paring back benefits and mobility and recruitment incentives, while unfairly targeting certain vulnerable categories of staff.

Despite this far from radiant future, the staff representatives of the ILO will, of course, continue to fight to improve the framework for internal labour relations, in order that it may serve as an example to the entire United Nations system. The greater the presence of consultation in an undertaking, the greater the motivation of staff and the effectiveness of the group as a whole. It is, incidentally, interesting, if not to say absolutely obvious, to note the extent to which progress and success in this document are proportional to the level of consultation that the Human Resources Department was able to have with the Union. This stands regardless of whether it relates to staff recruitment and selection or improving the working environment, and includes the collective agreements signed by staff representatives on maternity protection and against harassment, which have promoted a better work–life balance.

By contrast, each time that staff representatives were not sufficiently consulted, the situation is completely different and could often be improved. With regard to career management and development, the acquisition and development of electronic support tools, billed as essential to entry into the modern world, are far from having proven themselves, due to incompatibilities and because no proper evaluation has taken place to assess their effectiveness. In addition, the persistent nature of archaic administrative bodies and practices (notably the complete lack of transparency and right of defence before the Reports Board or the opaque processes for recognizing merit) and irregular practices that promote unequal careers among staff according to their contractual situation or sex, contribute to latent dissatisfaction among staff.

There is a similar situation with all training programmes, which were, for the most part, developed unilaterally and without consulting any staff representatives, because the Joint Training Board has not met for five years. The staff representatives have advocated tirelessly for it to be reactivated.

I must also return to the classification exercise for jobs in the field, an issue that has refused to disappear since the mobilization of staff in 2010, and which finally began in 2015. The staff will not allow this to turn into a veiled rationalization exercise for our colleagues in the field; weary survivors as they are of three structural reforms since 2010 and who have been cut back to the point that certain activity programmes are no longer able to offer their basic services. The Staff Union will take particular interest in ensuring that the agreements on duties that it has signed with the administration are applied to the letter.

I could continue and comment in detail on each chapter of this document, but I will spare you that long list in order to focus on what is essential. In light of all the reforms and changes that staff have endured in the past few years, and also the changes to come – notably those linked to the examination of administrative processes whose purpose appears rather removed from the basic principles promoted and defended by our Organization – vigilance is a must. It is not, as I heard with some alarm in this room yesterday, a case of changing the DNA of

the ILO along with its culture. First and foremost, change is not decreed, it is led or at least guided. Secondly, is it not precisely the culture of the ILO above all that it is important to preserve? Would it not be better to make informed use of our Organization's genes – the right to social protection, the right to decent work and the right to justice and social dialogue – in order to construct the foundations on which all future internal programming and strategies can be built?

In conclusion, and in keeping with that spirit of dialogue, I would ask you, ladies and gentlemen delegates, to ensure that the staff representatives are fully included in this future human resources strategy. The staff representatives are convinced that this is the sole and only means by which the ILO will be able calmly and efficiently to achieve its objectives, while negotiating exemplary work and working conditions with its staff that are fair, progressive and ultimately worthy of the spirit and aims of its mandate.

Thank you.
