



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
(328th Session – 1 November 2016)**

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

I have the honour to address you today as Chairperson of the ILO Staff Union, which represents 70 per cent of the Organization's staff members. For many years, it has been customary for the representative of the Staff Union to inform you of its position on the session and on the documents presented in so far, of course, as these documents have an impact on the working and service conditions of the Organization's staff. It also gives you, the members of the Governing Body, an opportunity to assess the status of social dialogue within the ILO.

Labour relations

Since this session is slightly different in that it marks the end of a Director-General's first four-year term of office, the Staff Union would like to comment briefly on the issue of social dialogue.

In 2012, as you know, the situation of labour relations in the ILO was not encouraging and, in any case, did no credit to the Organization. To put it simply, we had stopped talking to each other. Since the arrival of the current Director-General, Mr Guy Ryder, management and the staff representatives have worked slowly but surely to reweave the fabric of social dialogue. The past four years have involved hours of observation rounds, discussions, negotiations and periods of both calm and turbulence. But at least dialogue has not faltered since then and the Staff Union welcomes this development.

Moreover, the fact that several collective agreements were signed during this period is proof of the benefits of collective bargaining, which ensures a degree of social harmony even within an international organization in which it is sometimes difficult for the staff

representatives to identify the officials with whom they should be speaking. In any event, these representatives strongly hope that with the appointment of a new UN Secretary-General, the ILO will serve as a model for labour relations and that its staff, constituents and Director-General, working together, will apply their persuasive skills to make collective bargaining a reality throughout the UN system. This is in all of our interests.

Even within the Office, where tripartism is customary, the fabric of social dialogue is fragile and, like a fishing net, requires constant care to keep it from unravelling.

To that end, the ILO Staff Union and management have taken another step in strengthening labour relations this year by, among other things, improving the functioning of the Joint Negotiating Committee through the appointment of an independent Chairperson. The staff representatives hope that this joint decision will help to ensure that positions are balanced, tangibly improve the Staff Union's access to the information required for negotiations and lead to calmer discussions.

Of course, significant challenges lie ahead for the ILO and its staff, so I will now share with you the staff members' current concerns about the documents submitted for your consideration and approval during this session.

Implementation of the UN General Assembly's decisions on the compensation package (GB.328/PFA/9)

As you know, the conditions of service of ILO staff members are governed in part by what is known as the United Nations common system. The reform of the staff compensation package proposed by the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) was not welcomed by UN staff members and, over the past three years, has been the subject of many discussions between the ICSC and international staff federations. Let us recall that, in principle, the purpose of the reform was to simplify a system that was considered overly complex. It was adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 2015 over the objections of the entire staff and, as the latter had predicted, its initial objectives have not been met because its implementation is complex and time-consuming; little money will be saved and the reform even goes against some of the other recommendations made by the member States. At present, the only impact of the reform is to significantly worsen staff members' conditions of service over the long term not only with regard to wages and career prospects, but also by reducing staff mobility incentives, including for high-risk duty stations. The ILO staff is particularly shocked to see these measures accepted by the same member States that are calling for the recruitment of highly skilled staff and the promotion of mobility in the field. Obviously, if the UN really wanted to attract highly qualified staff, particularly young people, the solution was not to make its posts less attractive by reducing the conditions and benefits necessary for effective work in the field.

The ILO staff representatives are even more disappointed by the manner in which the proposed amendments to their Regulations were discussed. The autonomous nature of the

Regulations, the previous negotiations and the recent signing of the Collective Agreement, intended primarily to encourage mobility in the field, required transitional measures to mitigate the demoralizing effect of the compensation package on staff. However, management not only elected not to take the staff's requests on this matter into account but avoided opening discussions on any other UN General Assembly decisions, including the one that increased the retirement age to 65.

In short, the staff do not support the amendments to the Staff Regulations because they will not help to recruit highly qualified staff and, in the long term, will reduce staff members' career prospects and conditions of service and, above all, will undermine all of the Organization's recent efforts, under the guidance of the Governing Body, to encourage greater mobility in the field.

Moreover, the staff, together with the UN staff federations and unions, have begun a legal study of the rationale for the decisions taken by the General Assembly and their impact on the acquired rights of civil servants. They also reserve the right to take any available steps, including legal action, once these measures enter into force.

The ILO's Strategic Plan for 2018–21 (GB.328/PFA/1) - Preview of the Programme and Budget proposals for 2018–19 (GB.328/PFA/2)

Although these documents were discussed yesterday, the staff representatives have read them carefully and would like to draw the attention of the Governing Body to the following remarks. Clearly, the practice of not allowing these representatives to speak until after a discussion has concluded is becoming habitual.

The staff representatives note that paragraph 65 of the Strategic Plan refers to the "One ILO" approach, a term coined by the Staff Union, and are pleased that management has taken it on board. It must, however, become more than an empty promise; over 40 per cent of ILO staff members are working on development cooperation projects under unsafe conditions that prevent them from carrying out their work properly or from achieving a decent work-life balance. For example, the member States' recent decision to drastically reduce budget allocations to HIV/AIDS activities has, not on paper but in practice, led to post reductions and lay-offs for men and women, some of whom had served the Organization for a decade or more. These colleagues, who are being callously told that because they work in development cooperation, they are not really part of the Organization and have no career prospects, feel great bitterness at being relegated to a subcategory of staff members; some of them are only entitled to have their contracts extended on a month-to-month basis, often owing to a lack of overall planning or to the excessive parcelling of development cooperation funds.

The staff representatives have also taken note of the statement, in paragraph 65, that it is artificial to compartmentalize activities by source of funding and of the proposals for remedying that situation. The Staff Union cautions against any attempt to use this proposal to

dilute the ongoing and fundamental work of the Organization on matters such as standards, unemployment policy and any other essential activity by equating them with mere short-term missions fated to be lost in the shifting tides of priorities or decisions that circumvent the Governing Body's oversight. This is a basic governance issue that would have immediate repercussions for staff members, particularly those whose positions are funded from the ILO's regular budget. It is absolutely essential for the staff of international organizations and, a fortiori, those of the ILO to have long-term contracts so they can work safely and, above all, independently. Such contracts are the very life blood of the international civil service; they are its strength and enable its members to keep a cool head and put their skills to use wherever in the world they are needed as one political or economic crisis follows another.

Lastly, the staff representatives have also taken note of paragraphs 67 and 68 and, in so doing, learned for the first time of the proposal to redeploy at least 60 workers from administrative functions to policy and technical work as part of the comprehensive review of all business processes. Staff representatives are always sorry to learn of such a proposal, which will inevitably have a significant impact on the staff and was never mentioned at the meetings held with the Staff Union precisely in order to discuss such matters. Rest assured that the Staff Union noted, during yesterday's discussion of this document, that this will entail a transfer of functions. How, exactly, are the incumbents of administrative posts – not all of whom have reached the retirement age – supposed to become child labour specialists or labour economics researchers with the stroke of a pen? With all this reprofiling ahead of us, might it not be worth giving serious consideration to increasing the Human Resources Development budget? How else will this high-wire act be pulled off successfully?

In short, the proposal contained in paragraph 68 should not have been included in this document because the necessary consultation process has yet to be held. Given its impact on the working and service conditions of staff members, it should first be discussed in depth with the staff representatives.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you see, the fact that the ILO has the right tools for dealing with employment relations does not make the task any easier.

Of course, these concerns have also been raised with management during our ongoing negotiations, particularly on the reform of the contracts policy and on implementation of the UN General Assembly's decision to raise the mandatory retirement age to 65 as from 2018. Naturally, we hope that the outcome of these negotiations will allow the Organization not only to face the future boldly, fully equipped and appropriately skilled, but to care for its staff members by valuing them, protecting them and giving them the trust that they need in order to meet the goals that it has set for them, which are commensurate with the fundamental values and principles that it has been defending and promoting for almost a century.

Thank you for your attention.
