



18 March 2025

**Statement by the Chairperson of the Staff Union  
353rd Session of the Governing Body  
(11 March 2025)**

Chairperson,  
Director-General,  
Members of the Governing Body,  
Dear colleagues, and all of you here today, in the room and online,

First of all, I would like to express my solidarity and empathy with my colleagues and the entire community of workers at the ILO, at the United Nations and around the world who are affected by political, economic and social decisions that go against the founding principles of the right to work, a fundamental human right that provides the foundation of a person's dignity, well-being and fulfilment as a human being.

The opportunity to represent all ILO staff, and to share with you the major concerns and perspectives at the heart of our work and our commitment to fulfil the mandate for social justice that you have given us, is a responsibility that I do not take lightly.

This responsibility is all the greater given the trust that a large majority of ILO staff, almost 70 per cent of whom are members of the Staff Union, have placed in me. The adoption of a resolution at our most recent General Meeting last month, on the consequences for ILO staff of the decisions of the US Administration on its funding of the ILO, was a powerful expression of this trust. The resolution gives the Staff Union a clear mandate to undertake all action that it deems necessary in the current context, based on our principles and values of social dialogue and collective bargaining. It reaffirms that human value must be considered and preserved, and that it is more important than ever to uphold the Organization's duty of care towards its employees and to promote our principles of non-discrimination and solidarity.

Members of the Governing Body, this time I will spare you from listing my feelings, as I did last October. My humanity might bore you and, after all, too few months have passed since then. This is also one of the reasons why I will not comment in detail on the documents on the agenda for the Programme, Financial and Administrative Section. In October, I enthusiastically welcomed the programmatic priorities regarding the objectives for ILO staff and called for the effective allocation of adequate resources to translate these objectives into concrete and firm action.

In any case, my statement comes at the end of your discussions on most of the documents submitted under this section. Also, many of those relating directly to the employment of ILO colleagues were submitted for information pending substantive proposals, and I am unable to hide my surprise at some of the proposals made since yesterday, whether on relocation or on the use of workspaces. The Staff Union remains as determined as it was in October to move forward through constructive dialogue, prioritizing negotiations on the harmonization of working conditions regardless of the sources of funding for contracts and enhanced mobility, which must enable the Organization to implement reforms aimed at achieving excellence in working conditions and finding pragmatic, creative and innovative solutions to ensure that these conditions are exemplary. The fight against precarious employment and the promotion of job security and non-discrimination are essential for better productivity and exemplary performance. We therefore hope that the next Governing Body session in October will provide an opportunity to present you with tangible outcomes from the negotiations that we wish to conduct with our dialogue partners within the Administration, to whom I extend my regards. These negotiations can only succeed if they are conducted in accordance with the principles of collective bargaining and social dialogue.

Members of the Governing Body, I wish to talk to you today about trust – the trust that, in one way or another, we yearn for in order to be the architects of social justice in the world of work, at varying levels of responsibility and in different roles, of course.

First and foremost, it is the trust we place in the basic tenets of universal human rights, and particularly labour rights, which it is our duty to promote. This legal framework is rooted in history, and its principles have been built up gradually and have proven their worth. As ILO officials, we are driven by a profound sense of responsibility for this legacy, which gives our work meaning. We are privileged not to be here “just to put food on the table”, as the saying goes, but to be working for a purpose. This is what drives us to always go the extra mile, despite the mental and psychological burden. The results of the organizational health survey shared with all staff at the beginning of this year are indeed alarming in terms of the self-assessment of burnout and an excessive workload. You are, of course, the builders and promoters of these basic tenets, and we should trust each other in preserving our common heritage and exercising our shared responsibility.

Then there is trust in the ILO’s ability to reinvent itself and prove its relevance despite shifting trends and priorities. We have in the past been able to provide a normative framework for the key issues of the time and, through our technical cooperation activities, to support you, our constituents, in delivering on this mandate. The challenges are too great for the ILO to be absent in addressing issues such as technological upheaval and artificial intelligence, biological hazards, the care economy, reconstruction, fair and just transitions, and the new social contract. Throughout its history, the ILO has had to reinvent its structures and operations by securing mandatory budget contributions and mobilizing ever more voluntary contributions, allowing us to fulfil our mandate thanks to all 3,617 staff members around the world. So yes, the ILO is a wise old lady, but, thanks to our predecessors, she has always found an elixir of youth. It is now up to us to renew the recipe of this elixir with the ingredients of our time.

This recipe cannot be achieved without the founding principle of social dialogue. Certainly, reaching a decision on the basis of consultation, negotiation and consensus can be a long, tedious process. You know this, of course, at least as much as I do. But this is the recipe for success. It is not easy, that is true, and it often requires patience and time. For the ILO Staff Union, I make no secret of the fact that we can never rest on our laurels; constant vigilance is required to ensure that decisions are made in a way that respects these principles of internal social dialogue, rather than being presented as a *fait accompli*. In

this regard, I thank the Worker spokesperson, Catelene, who reminded us yesterday in her introduction of the importance of involving colleagues when making decisions on working conditions. This reminder is indeed necessary. And it is often tiring to have to keep reiterating why, at the end of the day, this is a win-win situation for everyone. But who said that social dialogue was natural and self-evident? That would be too easy ... and often success does not come easily. So yes, we must continue to trust in our principles, because even if that is not self-evident, there is no other option if we want ultimately to win, together.

Of course, trust does not mean a lack of supervision. Clearly, it is your responsibility to carry out checks to identify the areas and processes that need changing. We also understand, of course, the importance of asking questions, seeking improvements or even abandoning subjects or solutions that appeared promising, but which have failed or ceased to bear fruit. This is something else my colleagues expect, as their schedules get busier with the addition of new priorities and workstreams, while they are unable to set aside other issues that continue to be deemed indispensable.

Members of the Governing Body, without trust, we are unable to make the decisions and take the actions that should be necessary to achieve our objectives in an effective, meaningful way. In this regard, it is revealing to note the number of requests made to the Ethics Office, as reported this morning, and the number of allegations and complaint and investigation processes. It is, of course, important and indeed essential to ensure that our actions are aligned with the ethical standards required of us as international civil servants, and I can only thank my Ethics Officer colleague, my colleagues from human resources, the Mediator and the Staff Welfare Officer for their advice. However, many colleagues are coming to me with questions about the ethics of their actions, out of fear of doing the wrong thing – a sign they have lost their bearings, leading to indecision on principles that should not, in any case, be up for debate and which formed the basis for our recruitment.

We have been accustomed to building this trust in a context of stability. Yet we are now in a context of insecurity, with many of our reference points seemingly upended, and a pace of change that is accelerating, leaving us overwhelmed and frightened. We need leaders to guide us and provide us with a framework. We need to find the keys to this trust in this context of successive crises. The call for better leadership has therefore been identified as one of the key areas for improvement in the staff survey on the organizational health of the ILO. We must find a better way of sharing risks in order to guarantee robust, sustainable results. It is frightening at the moment for many colleagues to be in a state of uncertainty, not knowing whether their projects can continue or whether, on the contrary, funding will be withdrawn, therefore threatening all the results being achieved, wasting past efforts and jeopardizing the attainment of our shared objectives. It is also frightening for colleagues around the world not to know what tomorrow will bring, whether they are already facing or will have to face redundancy and all its consequences, including the personal ones. It is frightening to wonder about the extent to which the ILO will be ready and able to meet its duty of care and protection towards its most precious asset – the people who serve it.

Members of the Governing Body, the staff I represent are not naive. Our world is a tough place. It seems that the margin for error is very limited and that expectations are extremely high. We need this mutual trust in order to move forward. At the heart of this trust, there is a vital ingredient that we cannot afford to forget – solidarity. It is this solidarity that allows us once again to put people, goodwill and empathy at the centre of our actions, and which reminds us that if we are together here, it is because – in order to promote social justice – we have no choice other than to build and maintain this trust.

I would like to conclude my statement by addressing all my colleagues at headquarters and in the field. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your commitment, hard work and dedication. Each of us plays an essential role in our collective success, and it is thanks to your daily involvement that we can move forward together. Members of the Governing Body, dear colleagues, let us continue to move forward with trust and solidarity, because we are a strong, united organization.

Thank you for your attention.

S  verine Deboos  
Chairperson, Staff Union Committee

---