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**STATEMENT BY THE STAFF UNION REPRESENTATIVE
TO THE PROGRAMME, FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE
OF THE ILO GOVERNING BODY
14 March 2003**

It is according to well-established tradition that I address the Governing Body today on behalf of the Committee and the Staff Union of the International Labour Office, at a time of great difficulty in international affairs.

Our Committee cannot stand by in the light of events that are once again threatening the world. We are therefore proud to be the source of an initiative by the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA), which unanimously adopted at its recent annual council meeting a resolution by means of which the staff union organizations of the United Nations agencies declare their absolute support for the Secretary-General and the efforts that he continues to make to safeguard the opportunity for lasting peace. We also support, as does FICSA, the related efforts of the European Trade Union Confederation, including for today.

Still at the international level and with regard to the serious political crisis in Côte d'Ivoire and our colleagues in the Abidjan Office, you are, of course, aware of the special measures that the Director-General decided to take for the protection of our colleagues, particularly those recruited locally, when Phase IV of the United Nations security plan – programme suspension – was announced.

The Staff Union in Geneva and staff representatives at the ILO Office in Abidjan – a Regional and Area Office – have played an active role in planning and implementing this security plan, which is decidedly more “progressive” than the standard plan still retained by the United Nations, whereby locally recruited staff are left to fend for themselves in a state of emergency – sometimes with tragic consequences, such as those we have seen in Rwanda in the sadly not-so-distant past.

We obviously do not know how and when the crisis in Côte d'Ivoire will be resolved and we can only hope that the measures taken will allow its most negative consequences for all staff to be averted.

It was useful, however, to draw your attention to the new and constructive way in

which collaboration between all the sectors concerned was set up and the quality of solidarity with our colleagues that was elicited by this crisis. We are, of course, convinced that when new crises arise, as seems unfortunately inevitable, the Abidjan situation will be used to illustrate what the Office can and must do, particularly for its local staff.

The Staff Union, which I am proud to chair, is a new team that espouses the concerns of those teams that have preceded it. A new team often means new working methods, new approaches and new priorities. A new team does not mean an inexperienced team, and the practical approach that we intend to bring to our activities will be solidly anchored in the traditions that are the pride of this house.

The first session of our annual general meeting has just taken place. The Staff Union Programme and Strategy for 2003 was adopted, and this can be summarized in a few key words: activism, communication, effective implementation of “good” collective agreements, equality of treatment between headquarters and the field, development of career policies, improvement of employment and working conditions, international solidarity and solidarity among organizations, openly and systematically taking into account gender issues.

Some of these areas support those that are addressed in the documents submitted to you at this session of the Governing Body, a session that is particularly rich with regard to issues that directly concern the staff.

The programme and budget proposals inevitably have important implications for every employee of the ILO, as much in what is said as in what is not said.

The documents submitted to you on the composition and structure of the staff accurately reflect the house and its perspectives for the future. The study of the Human Resources Strategy, which must continue, clearly shows the major axes around which Union representatives and representatives of the Director-General, under your supervision, will be able to work together so that a motivated staff may work even more effectively in the promotion of our common objectives.

The foundations of the Human Resources Strategy bear witness, as it says in document GB.286/PFA/13, to, and I quote, “the Director-General’s continuing commitment to collective bargaining and to working in close partnership with the Staff Union and staff in implementing the Strategy”.

In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that the first sitting of our Joint Negotiating Committee for 2003 took place in a very positive atmosphere – and even took place in the Staff Union meeting room. This sitting of the Joint Negotiating Committee had mainly to decide on the priorities for the work of the committee over the current year. The parties, it should be said, had hardly any difficulty in coming to an agreement. The meeting had been well prepared and it was short.

For our part, we informed the representatives of the Director-General of our determination that the subject of equality of treatment and solidarity with the weakest, the

least well protected, which are in fact related, be visible as the common theme of Union participation in the Joint Negotiating Committee.

We believe, in particular, that there are still too many difficulties in the field, where moreover the majority of staff work, for there to be real equality of opportunity and treatment with headquarters, whether we speak of security, trade union rights, training, career prospects, access to social security benefits or quite simply the right to respect as an individual. This will be a key element of union action during the mandate of our team and the first meeting of our Working Group on Equality of Treatment between the Field and Headquarters has shown the importance that should be given to these issues.

We also believe that gender issues, as regards equal opportunity between men and women, need still to make considerable progress so that objectives of parity are achieved. To confine ourselves to professionals and higher categories, how can we not see that the percentage of women is inversely proportional to the level of responsibility? This is certainly not a reflection of competence. How can we also not see that the jobs where women are most numerous are also those where career prospects are least certain. Our Union held a special assembly on these issues, which it has made one of its highest priorities, on the eve of International Women's Day.

We believe finally that it is more than time that the ILO defined its own policy with regard to employment and working conditions for disabled people. We have therefore launched an initiative in this area and we have noted, with great satisfaction, the positive reverberations that this has had throughout the building.

On the subject of this building, we have noted with interest the comment in the programme and budget proposals that have been submitted to you, and I quote from paragraph 80 of Information Annex I, "The examination of the desirability of establishing an internal occupational safety and health unit, as part of the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy which would also incorporate the existing medical services functions, has reached an advanced stage".

Such an advance would provide an answer to a long-standing claim of our Union, one that has been shown to be well founded as a result of events, conclusions for which have not yet been satisfactorily drawn, a little more than a year ago – I speak, of course, of the fire that seriously damaged the first floor of our building. This building, as indeed unfortunately some of the civil servants that occupy it, is growing older. This also affects working conditions and I am happy to hear that the decision has been taken to organize henceforth, on a monthly basis, regular meetings between representatives of the Staff Union committee and internal administration.

Unfortunately, the willingness to engage in consultation and dialogue which that decision reflects is not yet the reflex reaction of those in the International Labour Office who hold or believe they hold power. The simple, common-sense arrangements that ought to prevail are not systematically applied at every level of management, though management is at the service of social dialogue and its ideals.

You have examined the Programme and Budget proposals for 2004-05 and will have noted that some of them involve restructuring that has implications for the budgetary credits allocated to one or another unit – I am thinking in particular of our colleagues in the Publications Branch, the very people who spent many months in deplorable working conditions when fire wreaked havoc in their offices. Misfortunes never come singly, as the saying goes.

The programme and budget proposals provide for the credits allocated to the Publications Branch to be cut by some 25 per cent – a sizeable amount signifying a major change of the kind that has consequences for staff management which, I am sure you know full well, needs to be discussed constructively with the people most affected.

We hope that this will be the case at the ILO and we have asked that the implications for staff of the budget cuts that will affect the Publications Branch be discussed without delay with their representatives and the Staff Union. We have been told that the appeal for dialogue that we launched to those responsible for implementing budgetary decisions has been heard.

We hope that it will be acted on even though we have the odd impression that with the myriad of budgetary allocations envisaged at the ILO, the human implications of administrative decisions are sometimes masked by bureaucracy.

I nevertheless continue to hope that common sense will prevail and that the structural adjustments will be carried out as painlessly as possible for each and every staff member they may affect.

Likewise, I hope that the matter of the so-called “precarious contracts” will continue to be set right at the same rate of progress as hitherto, so as to eliminate conditions of employment insecurity which by definition are far removed from the concept of decent work.

Again in the interests of stability and broader horizons, we hope that a real start will at last be made on the integration with the staff of the Turin Centre, much desired by our staff unions at both headquarters and at Turin.

We have embarked on consultations on all fronts to secure progress in this area.

The Turin Centre, we all know, exists first and foremost for training – seen for so long as the poor relation of employment conditions at the ILO. The measures taken to set up Personal Development Plans, or PDPs, as a result of a collective agreement concluded in August 2001, appear to us to be a step in the right direction.

In particular, our Committee is following closely the operations under way or planned in the social protection sector at headquarters and in the Americas region, and we have noticed with great interest the hopes that have been placed in this exercise by the staff concerned: their involvement or willingness to participate actively reflects attachment to the principle underlying the arrangement.

It should be said in this connection that such participation would not have been possible without the very conscientious and effective preparatory work done by the staff concerned in the Human Resources Development Department and without the full collaboration of those in charge of the units selected to test the arrangements in real-life conditions.

It was therefore with some surprise that we thought we read, in the session document on Human Resources Strategy, that what is known as the “PDP initiative” but which in fact arose from a shared wish of the Staff Union and the Director-General, might be called into question. To our mind, that would be a mistake and we trust that these doubts will be allayed by the outcome of the pilot projects under way.

Yet Personal Development Plans will be meaningless and the contribution they can make to improving the overall quality of work by enhancing staff satisfaction will not be realized unless significant resources are finally devoted to training and unless careers policy is finally based not on random criteria but on the content of the Plans and the potential of all members of staff.

A careers policy begins with recruitment. It involves honest assessment of jobs, assigning an appropriate rank to each function and developing individual capacities. That in turn means that clear rules must be established and honestly applied.

The tasks at hand are enormous, and staff representatives have agreed with representatives of the administration to tackle them in the course of this year.

Clear rules and compliance with them do not preclude all risk of individual or collective labour disputes. September 2000 saw the introduction of an entirely renovated system, established by agreement, for handling grievances. Although there have been some good results – I mean results deemed by both sides to be honest – because of the system’s complexity implementation has met with a number of difficulties, such as understanding the new procedures and the roles to be played by all involved.

In short, the arrangements need to be reviewed, but that was anticipated. The Staff Union and the administration have agreed to make this matter one of their priority concerns and are in the process of seeking the best way to achieve tangible and lasting results as quickly yet as calmly as possible.

Mr. Chairperson, there is one area in which your Committee and the Governing Body can already help us to make significant progress. I refer to the reform of the ILO Administrative Tribunal, a process which, it should be recalled, has its origins in the very content of one of the first collective agreements concluded at the International Labour Office, which the Governing Body has already had occasion to examine.

Last year, I mean in 2002, the Joint Negotiating Committee reached an agreement on a number of improvements that might be envisaged for the functioning of the Tribunal. Having consulted both the Tribunal and the other organizations that recognize its jurisdiction

– of which there are 40 – the Office has submitted to you a paper containing its proposals on the matter (GB.286/PFA/17/2). In short, it plans to carry out further consultations with a view to proposing amendments to the Conference at its session in June 2004.

The Staff Union is keen to see prompt implementation of the agreement concluded on this matter. There is one facet of the reform which we feel very strongly about: recognition of the Staff Union's right to bring action before the Tribunal in certain instances. I accordingly launch an urgent appeal to you today for this matter to be brought before the Conference at its next session and for a decision on your part to place it on the agenda for June 2003.

You will no doubt also wish to ask the administration to pursue its dialogue with the Staff Union with a view to identifying possible areas of agreement for improving the functioning of the ILO Administrative Tribunal.

We all know the mote and beam parable and are aware that the circumstances in which the United Nations Administrative Tribunal operates leave much to be desired. But we also believe that one must pay attention to one's own shortcomings. The worth of an institution is judged among other things on its ability to reform, and well beyond the circle of the United Nations a large sector of the international community will be looking at what happens – or does not happen – at the ILO.

Mr. Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Director-General, I could have taken up many other subjects with you, including the conditions in which the so-called "common" system operates, the progress we wish to see in the area of social protection, the qualities that staff sometimes have difficulty in perceiving in some managers, our attachment to tripartism, even our doubts about a certain logo that was submitted to you.

There is no lack of subjects for the chairperson of the committee of a staff union which is in full expansion and stronger for its involvement in day-to-day matters and its representation among the officers of all bodies of the Governing Body and the Organization. A choice had to be made as to the issues we wished to bring to your attention and for which we seek your support and intervention. I know that I can thank you in advance for the action you will be kind enough to take in response to my statement and in order, inter alia, to promote throughout this house a far-reaching policy of social dialogue.

In conclusion, since the Director-General is present I should like to reiterate what I said at the beginning of my statement, to thank you for what you have done for Abidjan and to welcome the fact that we engage in dialogue with you and with the Human Resources Development Department. There are problems and difficulties, and we are aware of them. We each have our work programme and the issues we raise enable us to engage in substantive discussion. I look to the future with confidence and have no reason to doubt that I have put that confidence in the right place.
Thank you.