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**STATEMENT BY THE STAFF UNION REPRESENTATIVE
TO THE PROGRAMME, FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE
OF THE ILO GOVERNING BODY
(288th Session, November 2003)**

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The Staff Union Committee is preparing to welcome new members elected at headquarters, and the second session of our Annual General Meeting has just taken place, so it seems to me a good time to give a brief review of the way we see things have gone during 2003, a year during which our activities will have been in the hands of an almost completely new team.

A year of renewed contacts

Both the Union team and that of the administration were new when the first contacts were established in December 2002. The fact that we were able to start afresh, without any inherited antagonisms, certainly made it easier to re-establish social dialogue.

The path of consultation and collective bargaining was thus open to us once again, and some important advances were made, thanks especially to the climate of pragmatism and mutual respect which prevailed during the discussions of the Joint Negotiating Committee.

Among these advances, we can note that:

- A new reclassification procedure was adopted.
- Significant progress was made towards revision of the disputes settlement agreements, with the aim of simplifying them, using them more effectively and improving the protection of staff members' interests.
- The proposed reform of the Administrative Tribunal remains on track, even if it is advancing slowly (this was to be expected).
- The periodical titularization and promotion exercises proceeded smoothly.
- The role of Union representatives, in the field and at headquarters, won greater recognition.
- The Office should soon have a policy on the employment of disabled people and a policy on the induction of interns.

- Existing occupational safety and health mechanisms are in the process of being updated.
- The administration and the Staff Union are working on ways of dealing with the negative human effects of restructuring exercises in Geneva and in the field.
- There is a trend towards greater transparency with regard to mobility; the Joint Training Council is monitoring the implementation of pilot Personal Development Plans (PDPs).
- The ILO is leading the common system when it comes to security for its staff, both local and international.
- Respect for linguistic diversity (especially French and Spanish) is an undisputed positive feature of the ILO.
- The Office speaks with one voice when it comes to challenging certain initiatives or attitudes on the part of common system bodies – especially some proposals concerning pensions and local salaries. We hope this will also be the case if and when we are obliged to adjust contributions to our medical insurance fund, which, despite a considerable increase in medical costs, have remained unchanged for 14 years.

Some difficulties persist

At the same time, some of the procedures and areas of discord of the past are unfortunately still with us and put a strain on relations between staff and management, particularly with regard to individual cases, protection against arbitrary decisions, regular employment or simply the right to be heard by the administration.

The Staff Union must therefore take advantage of its authority by putting some new proposals on the table, concerning for example precarious “seasonal” workers or the part-timers working in different jobs and departments, whose employment and social conditions are not what might reasonably be expected of an institution like ours.

We have also drawn the attention of senior management to the traditional system of performance appraisals which has hardly changed, with all that this implies in terms of arbitrary decisions. A Reports Board which did not include any staff representatives managed to survive the criticism directed at it and the performance appraisal procedures by your Committee in March 2001.

Bureaucracy sometimes gets in the way of recruiting or promoting women and young officials, and the assessment centres are increasingly becoming an impediment, rather than a useful tool. Reform of recruitment and selection procedures will certainly be one of the main areas of work in 2004.

Staff working away from headquarters, and in particular local staff, have the feeling – alas, all too often with good reason – of being left out of consultations,

and mindsets are sometimes very hard to change, despite the clear commitment of the Director-General. In particular, our colleagues in the branch offices in the industrialized countries are acutely sensitive to what they regard as the inherent unfairness of their different treatment in terms of contracts, training and career development. There have been calls for an in-depth review of the discriminatory provisions in this area for more than 40 years but it has never taken place, despite the fact that we and the local staff and their managers have been pushing for one. Nothing has come of the commitment undertaken three years ago by representatives of the Director-General.

Because procedures are so slow, we are still waiting for the results of the 2000-01 reclassification exercise, and the administration and the Staff Union are seeking ways of making the Independent Review Group more effective.

Attempts to combat fraud, which were on a “back burner” for so long, are bearing some bitter fruit, albeit late in the day, and strike some very vulnerable members of staff. The Staff Union has sometimes had a hard time making its case heard for a reasonable degree of leniency.

Lastly, too much time has been spent by the common system on the search for lasting solutions to improve the situation of domestic partners of officials. This inertia is becoming intolerable for everyone concerned, and there has been no real development since this issue was first discussed two years ago. We believe that the ILO has the right, the duty and the wherewithal to move ahead, and should not lag behind other organizations such as the World Bank.

A full agenda

On the other hand, the difficulties that persist should certainly not make us forget the problems which we have managed to overcome. The former remind us how far we still have to go; the latter show us that progress is possible.

The document GB.288/PFA/17 which you have before you presents an effort to update the ILO’s Human Resources Strategy. I would now like to consider this strategy in a little more detail, going through each agenda item in turn.

Collective bargaining – I am happy to report that discussions within the Joint Negotiating Committee on our proposed common programme are proceeding smoothly and effectively. There is no reason for this to change, and the sound state of relations in this key collective bargaining body give the Staff Union, staff members and the Director-General, every reason to feel confident. The Committee faces a full agenda in the coming months, and will have to become familiar with every aspect of an ambitious and multifaceted human resources policy.

Job classification – With regard to job classification, the Staff Union is determined, with all the means available to it, to assert the principle that the only attitude that can be tolerated in the international civil service is respect for law. In other words, under our system grades must depend on the duties involved, rather

than on any contingent considerations. A change in the grading structure can therefore only be achieved gradually, as posts become vacant, and in the light of opportunities resulting from restructuring initiatives undertaken in accordance with existing rules. But nothing of any real substance will be achieved unless the desired structural changes are based on recruitment procedures that promote overall objectives, on in-depth consultations with staff aimed at defining practical means of restructuring, and on constant efforts to practice transparency, fairness and equality of opportunity in the management of human and labour relations.

Prospection, recruitment and selection – The document you have before you describes some notable advances that have been made in shortening the recruitment process. However, Staff Union representatives directly involved in this process believe that this information should be interpreted with caution. It refers to only one period – the first half of 2003 – during which the Human Resources Development Department dealt with relatively few recruitments and a number of precarious contracts were regularized, which takes little time once the objectives have been identified. The procedure itself is also open to criticism in a number of respects: the assessment centres in some cases have acted as the sole and final decision-making body; it is far from clear that their methods and testing procedures are geared to the cultural diversity of our organization; gathering of data crucial to effective career planning is slow and not sufficiently coordinated to support a medium-term strategy; and some line managers, whose prerogatives in this area have been enhanced, prefer to look outside the Office for higher level recruitment, rather than trying to facilitate internal promotion. In short, the Staff Union representatives believe that a good deal more than just cosmetic measures will be required when recruitments and selection procedures are reviewed in 2004.

Gender equality – Gender inequalities persist, and will continue to do so until those principally affected by it are given the means of enforcing the desired policies. This applies to recruitment, it applies to career planning and it applies to training.

How can the representation of women in senior posts be improved, while we also attempt to redress the balance in grade structure? The Office document seems to put its faith (no doubt with good reason) in the recruitment of young professionals. We must not forget, however, that not so long ago (barely ten years), recruitment of young female professionals was an accepted practice, and was easy to implement. Those young women have all shown themselves to be excellent officials; but they have not – with a few exceptions – made much headway in terms of career advancement during those ten years, simply because when the time came, the Office looked to outside candidates to fill the more senior posts for which the women in question had not been prepared, although the eventual need for replacements was known well in advance.

Past experience thus showed us that getting women into the senior grades could not be achieved in the short term without a targeted policy of recruitment at those grades, or without clearly defined objectives by sector and by region.

The absence of career prospects, the feeling of being forgotten, is not unique to young professional men and women. The same applies to the general service category: is it not true that most of those promoted to the national professional grades are men? How do we stand in terms of gender equality when it comes to the transition between “local” and “international” careers – a transition which other organizations in the United Nations family seem to manage with far less difficulty than the ILO?

Listing the difficulties and referring to past mistakes does not mean giving up on the idea of achieving progress. When it comes to equality of opportunity, then, as in other fields, the Staff Union will not give up, even if the road is a long and hard one. But we believe that words alone are not enough, goodwill alone is not enough, and a fundamental change in culture will be needed if our declared aims are to be achieved.

Career development – The introduction of Personal Development Plans (PDPs) was in its way a minor change in culture, and one which met with the wholehearted agreement of the Staff Union and colleagues in the sectors where pilot PDPs were introduced. The assessment of these Plans has been positive thus far. There is great interest in them, even beyond the pilot sectors. It is already clear that the PDP can be valuable both as a training tool and as a means of integration and planning. Using PDPs in pursuit of the Office’s overall human resources objectives appears to be a promising approach.

It seems reasonable to differentiate between PDPs and performance appraisals, even if there is some overlap between the two. And performance appraisal is an area where, in the view of the Staff Union, major efforts will be needed to create mechanisms that are honest, efficient and generally accepted. The present system has not been changed for decades, despite this Committee’s decision in March 2001 to undertake an in-depth reform. The current system is obsolete and leads to some perverse effects. The unilateral action taken in response to performance appraisals sometimes seems more like score settling. The Staff Union is therefore anxious to enter into serious discussions with the administration on the different aspects of the performance appraisal system.

Staff mobility – As for staff mobility, another recurrent theme in staff-management relations at the ILO, the Staff Union can only confirm that the consultations that have been held by the Human Resources Development Department have been extensive, serious and productive. All of us – staff from headquarters and the regions, men and women, single people and those with families, local and expatriate staff, line managers and their staff, new recruits and experienced officials, those who are mobile and those settled in one locality – have contributed our ideas in what has been a reasonably broad exercise in freedom of expression.

What we now have to do, together with the representatives of the Director-General, is to analyse the information obtained so far in the light of the Organization’s needs and to lay the foundations for a new policy which everyone will be able to support, one based on the freely given consent of all those involved, one which will include measures to prepare people for their return as

well as for their departure, as well as help for those in the process of moving, and social assistance. This means a policy that reflects the fact that it must be applied in more than one direction – from headquarters to the field, from field to headquarters and between regions – and does not exclude a priori certain categories of staff who can render great service to the Organization outside their countries of birth.

Strengthening the role of managers – Mobility often comes with greater staff management responsibilities for which officials may not be adequately prepared. The Staff Union therefore notes with interest the intentions of the Office to facilitate the “active participation of line managers” in implementing its Human Resources Strategy. Much remains to be done in this area – some of us think a great deal indeed – and we appreciate the efforts by the Human Resources Development Department to raise awareness among line managers of the constraints and obligations inherent in their position, given that they are not always sufficiently aware of the fact that they are managers not only of financial resources but also of human resources.

Contract policy reform – Line managers have often done much to help bring about the regularization of so-called “precarious” contracts. Much progress has been made, as the Office document emphasizes, even if in some cases a long-term solution has yet to be found. The Staff Union has proposed that consultations should now be extended to groups and categories of workers which have a regular but intermittent employment relationship with the Office, or those who combine jobs in different departments or units. We have submitted what we believe to be useful proposals for helping these colleagues who have hitherto had very little protection. I hope that a Staff Union representative will be in a position at the next meeting of this Committee to report on substantial progress.

Field security review

I sincerely hope that at the next meeting, we will not have to mourn the loss of more of our colleagues in the international civil service. The recent period has been a particularly bad one – and the opening on 24 October, United Nations Day, of the monument to officials who have fallen in the line of duty was a solemn and emotional occasion for all of us.

The document you have before you notes a number of advances in security in the field, and we pay tribute to those who have brought about that progress, including the Director-General himself, the Regional Directors, our colleagues in the Human Resources Development Department, and the various Staff Union representatives involved.

We believe that even more can still be done in the area of information, especially measures aimed at helping members of staff least familiar with modern communications techniques or foreign languages, who nevertheless, because of their jobs, face the greatest dangers. We are committed to working actively on this with representatives of the administration and in close collaboration with our field representatives.

With regard to headquarters, we also believe that consideration must be given to reasonable security measures, drawn up in the light of likely risks, and we are prepared to play an active part in any forums where such measures are examined. This might well include discussion on the scope of employer liability with regard to occupational hazards.

And it is with this double commitment on our part, Mr. Chairperson, that I now close. Thank you for your attention.
