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**STATEMENT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE STAFF UNION COMMITTEE
TO THE PROGRAMME, FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE
COMMITTEE OF THE ILO GOVERNING BODY**

(292nd Session – March 2005)

Mr Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen of the Committee,
Mr Director General,

It may be the changing of the seasons, or it may be nothing more than the fact that this Administration has to be able to point to some results when it holds meetings such as this one, where the staff representative has the honour to speak to you and to be sure of being heard.

Whatever the case, the Staff Union is gratified to note that dormant procedures are revived prior to Governing Body meetings.

In the run-up to the March 2005 session, then, we have been able to reach satisfactory conclusions on certain issues where it seemed as though stagnation had set in, such as the identification of good practices in reorganization, the employment of persons with disabilities and the use of interns. After a lengthy silence, discussion has begun again for a mobility policy that must exclude neither Turin nor locally recruited staff. There are now serious plans to implement methods of joint examination of the systemic difficulties of which individual cases are frequently symptoms. The Administration has sent its initial written proposals on the review of the agreement on recruitment and selection to the Union, and we must hope, after all this prevarication, that dialogue will finally be able to begin on the substance of the matter. The rails on which the engine of training is to run – I speak of personal development plans and joint training councils – have been recognized and have attracted interest, and the engine of training itself is now practically up and running on them. There have even been consultations with staff representatives on the proposed Human Resources Strategy: brief and belated they may have been, but they were also meaningful and constructive.

We are in a climate which is, in relative terms, marked by social dialogue, and we hope to see it develop sustainably. In this climate, I wish to focus my speech on a number of themes that all represent priorities in your work and, incidentally, feature in the Human Resources Strategy before you.

I will be addressing the issues of *restructuring* arising both from the programme and budget proposals and from IRIS, *recruitment* procedures, the *processing of grievances* at work, *gender equity issues*, the position of our colleagues at *Abidjan* and the situation of the *Staff Health Insurance Fund*.

All of this is set against the background of the common system and the attempts of the International Civil Service Commission to interfere in the day-to-day running of international organizations. Last November, you heard the concerns of the staff regarding this interference, and our Union continues its constant action on the matter side by side with the representatives of staff elsewhere in the United Nations system and, I am pleased to be able to tell you, in close consultation with representatives of the Director-General of the ILO.

Restructuring

I shall not go into detail concerning the various components that make up the proposed Programme and Budget for 2006-07, but it will not surprise you to discover that the first reaction of the staff in general on learning of the proposals was to wonder what the consequences might be for employment – not just in terms of the quantity of work, but also in terms of the quality of jobs that the ILO would be able to offer within such a framework.

And there is indeed cause for concern. The Union has conducted a partial statistical study of the year 2004, which confirms that, for its part, the Human Resources Development Department had neither the resources nor the necessary approach to detect abuses effectively, even though the raw data patently showed multiple instances of individual situations where the combination of subcontracting or piece-work, short-term or very short-term contracts and unpaid or very poorly paid internships had, time and time again, allowed jobs to be done, in effect, outside the normal rules governing labour relations. It is not that we lack regulations – simply that the regulations we have are ignored, bypassed and twisted.

When a meeting of the Union was held concerning the attitude of the Office to certain glaring abuses in the field of employment – interns working unpaid, the circumvention of procedures for external collaboration contracts, arbitrary interruption of contracts to avoid paying social benefits, long-term employment on a temporary basis despite the existence of vacancies, disregard of established procedures when people were being hired and more – it proved to attract a lot of attention and was very well attended.

Since then, the management has informed you of its intention to begin a review of a 2002 circular on “inappropriate use of employment contracts” because, over time, the provisions of that circular have proved inadequate in the face of what might be called a “new precariousness”. We were able to hold discussions on the proposed Human Resources Strategy, during which we succeeded in clarifying certain issues with ILO management – particularly with regard to the pre-eminence of organizational structures and posts in any classification procedure.

Nevertheless, uncertainties remain regarding the final level of resources available, the significant burden of a number of tasks that are apparently deemed essential but are not to be carried out internally, the lack of a centralized joint monitoring mechanism to avoid deviation from procedure in recruitment, the increasing temptation – given budgetary restrictions and the options available to managers – to juggle between different types of contracts, the total lack of any consultation in certain reorganization work which is vitally relevant to the functioning of the

Office and its officials and the lack of follow-up on the results of the massive consultation process conducted by the Human Resources Development Department throughout the whole structure of the Office to determine a new mobility policy. All of this leads many here at the ILO to take – shall we say – a somewhat sceptical view of their own professional futures.

But it is possible to imagine other approaches – participatory approaches that would motivate staff and be effective for the work of the whole ILO – and the Union is making sure to use its power to make proposals to move matters forward. And sometimes things of this type can move forward with hardly any help at all.

In your attentive reading of the proposals for the programme and budget, you will doubtless have noticed, in the appendices to the proposals, that the reduction in salary costs was to be derived particularly from very substantial reorganization and would affect practically every section at ILO headquarters. In this regard, we have recent examples that we can give of instances where widely differing approaches have been followed. This is especially instructive for a union that seeks to listen to its members.

The first example comes from the International Labour Standards Department, where a new manager carried out a restructuring process through detailed consultation and by drawing up all the details of the new form of organization with the participation of the staff. The process took several extremely full weeks, but the whole department has now not merely accepted the new organizational form but seems to have assimilated it completely.

The other example is that of the Employment Sector, where it was decided to reorganize the department structure without consulting the staff. The fruits of this have been frustration – including for those whose personal development plans have suddenly become meaningless thanks to one circular. Of course, it seems quicker, but now everything still remains to be done to bring the new system into operation, define individuals' roles and transition between the two forms of organization – and all with the handicap of having first to justify the organizational form that has been chosen.

Subparagraph 29(i) of document GB.292/PFA/17 states that “the flow of information to and communication between management, the Staff Union and staff needs to be improved, particularly in situations involving restructuring of work units, reorganization of work and policy or other initiatives which have significant change implications”.

It is in this spirit that, in the last few months, the two parties of the Joint Negotiating Committee have drawn up Guidelines for Management of Change and Processes of Restructuring. Several management figures have already committed to complying with these guidelines even before there has been any official communication – and I would like to specify that, besides the example of the International Labour Standards Department, this applies also to the Official Relations Branch, whose new structure is currently being formulated, and whose branch director has committed to involving staff representatives since the very start of the restructuring process.

As time passes, it is happily becoming more and more common to see consultation with the workers as a matter of course – and the Committee flatters itself that its capacity to intervene, its representativeness and the quality of its proposals have not been entirely irrelevant in bringing this about.

The IRIS project

The various wrong turns and ups and downs of the IRIS project also testify to a concern, not only to inform, but also to listen to representatives of the staff. The Union is now represented on the Stakeholders' Committee, where it continues to be on guard for any problems in the implementation of the project. The Union representative in that forum has spoken on issues of training, transition from one system to the other, the consequences for the regions and the overall structure of the project in general, among other things. At the planned meeting between departmental delegates and the Executive Director responsible for the project at the current stage, our colleagues will give an account of the concerns and expectations of the staff.

The management of the Union is regularly in direct contact with the general administrator of the project, and the improved understanding of certain difficulties expressed by the staff is beginning to bear fruit, particularly in the areas of languages and medium-term training strategy, but also by the fact that the constraints on the project are no longer systematically used to justify technical stagnation, administrative inertia or insidious deterioration of whole swathes of working conditions.

This is a constructive approach, yet it cannot satisfy our deepest concerns. For these concerns, as you know, have to do with the one-off and recurring costs of the project, the sidelining of particular services that are central to the Office during the initial definition of lines and procedures and the practice of subcontracting, in particular subcontracting IT services. The three of these together could without a doubt contribute to turning IRIS from a tool to a burden, whose demands would eventually be felt as just so many severe restrictions on the ILO's freedom to manoeuvre.

A sort of ICSC for IT, but without any level of legitimacy derived from the common system at all.

We know that your Committee is especially attentive to these matters and is aware of the risks. Be assured that the staff is also alert and vigilant.

Settlement of disputes

In just the same way, we remain alert and vigilant with regard to the prevention and settlement of disputes.

The Human Resources Strategy before you reports progress in the implementation of new procedures for which negotiations were completed a year ago – this progress is real.

More efficient mechanisms that place more emphasis on prevention are being put in place as planned and are being put to use throughout the Organization, rather than being the preserve of a Geneva or international elite. Mediators have been appointed both at headquarters and in the regions and training for them is to be held in April. The training for investigators into sexual harassment has already taken place. Three chairpersons have been appointed to the JAAB – the Joint Appeals Advisory Board – while a brochure publicizing the new mechanisms is nearly complete. The Union has engaged the services of a judicial advisor, who continues successfully to resolve the problems of ILO workers in difficulties. He is a lawyer whose reputation goes far beyond the doors of this Organization – and not, we hope, because of the delays with which we continue to be faced in regularizing his administrative status.

Meanwhile, the management continues to lose cases at the Tribunal that could certainly have been avoided had they been discussed calmly with the managers responsible, who are too often ignorant of legal regulations. Here we see, without any doubt, the legacy of a system that favours conflict over cooperation. Yet, happily, this system too underwent reform just over a year ago.

I am still astonished that your Committee is not informed of the rulings of the ILO Administrative Tribunal in cases relating to the Office. One of the aims set out by the Human Resources Development Department for the next biennium is a reduction of 30 per cent in the number of disputes taken before internal bodies, and we hope that this objective will not be reached by ceasing to allow cases to come before those bodies in favour of submitting them directly to the Tribunal – which would effectively be a policy of hand-washing à la Pontius Pilate – nor through the negative effect of other measures that are parts of the same Human Resources Strategy, beginning from the recruitment and selection procedures.

Recruitment and selection

I have already mentioned that negotiations – which have not always been plain sailing – were under way in this area. The two parties are now agreed that the greatest stumbling block is the existence or otherwise of a central supervision or monitoring body. It should be noted that the apparently arbitrary nature of some appointments or promotions and the corresponding lack of a careers policy or effective follow-up on the application of broad management principles feature among the most common complaints submitted to the Union.

For over five years now, directors have had broad freedom in the area of recruitment, and this has had severely negative effects, including in the area of mobility: how are people to apply for jobs if vacancies are not published? And how are they to feel at ease about leaving Geneva when it is in Geneva that careers are made, in close contact to the decision-makers themselves?

If you read it rightly, document GB.292/PFA/16, on the composition and structure of the staff, is particularly interesting. The number of recruitments is irrelevant here: in 2004, 31 civil servants were recruited to non-linguist positions, 19 of whom were men and 12 women, and only ten of whom came from under-represented countries, and there is nothing amazing about the fact that there has been no real progress in pursuing the grand objectives of equity between nationalities and genders.

Attempts to justify this mediocre performance by appealing to the regularization of precarious positions or promotion from the national to the international framework cannot be taken seriously. Promotions from the category of General Service staff to the Professional category are so rare as to be negligible, while the regularization of precarious positions ended in 2003.

The true problem, and the challenge of the current negotiations, is a lack of monitoring.

Gender equality

This challenge directly affects equality between the genders. I do not wish to dwell unnecessarily on the comments relating to the table provided in GB.292/PFA/17, which claim an

“overall balance in representation of men and women” even as the figures are showing a reduction in the number of women represented in all grades from P.2 to D.2.

We do not believe that an equity policy can claim success based on a number of exceptional cases of appointments at very high grades, even where those appointments are perfectly justified – which, at the ILO, they certainly are.

We are convinced – and this has been confirmed by the Staff Union Equity Audit, conducted by the Bureau for Gender Issues at our request – that gender policy has to cover all aspects of the conditions of employment and labour. This includes issues relating to job security, career planning, mobility, reconciling work and family life, access to training and early identification of talent within the Office – including the field structure and local staff.

Moreover, in order not to be trying to turn this analysis into action on our own, we have requested that the matter be taken up as a whole by the Joint Negotiating Committee, and are working in both the common system and the ILO with the 55 per cent of women and 45 per cent of men who are Union members.

The situation at Abidjan

We have 55 Staff Union members at Abidjan, 32 of whom are women. While peace has not yet prevailed in Côte d’Ivoire, there is growing concern regarding the fate of a number of our locally recruited colleagues.

For more than three months, a number of them have, for security reasons, had to stay away from the place where they were recruited, and are quite legitimately worried as to whether they will continue to have an employment relationship with the ILO. The current contracts of around 30 members of local staff, who ensure the running of the Regional Office, fall due on 31 March, and they have not been contacted regarding the renewal of their appointments. Meanwhile, the multidisciplinary technical team and a large proportion of the support services have moved out of the country, seemingly for the foreseeable future.

Needless to say, the Union Committee and its Vice-Chairperson for the Regions (the incumbent this year hailing from Africa) are following these matters intently, in close collaboration with representatives of the management and in direct contact with our colleagues on the ground. It goes without saying that we will not fail in our duty of vigilance and solidarity, and that this includes meticulous respect for procedures and for the rights of all our colleagues at the Regional and Sub-Regional Offices at Abidjan.

The Staff Health Insurance Fund

In the same way, we will continue to pay special attention to observing the quality of the services provided by the Staff Health Insurance Fund.

The text of the programme and budget refers indirectly to the need for essential measures to be taken immediately to protect the joint ILO/ITU Staff Health Insurance Fund.

It ought to be remembered that this pillar of social protection for civil servants has been in existence since 1922, which makes it without a doubt one of the oldest health insurance funds in the world. The principles of solidarity, sharing risk mutually between officials and between

current and retired employees, universal coverage, free choice, and bearing the costs according to each person's means – all these have proved their strength over the decades.

Our Fund is still extremely reasonable in terms of cost: the total contribution required – the worker's part and the employer's part together – has remained at 5.6 per cent for current employees and 8.4 per cent for pensioners for the last 15 years. However, inflating care costs have hit us especially hard, since the majority of the Fund's expenses are incurred in Geneva in the local currency, where the weak dollar exchange rate automatically results in an unfavourable situation because of the thresholds which are expressed in the reference currency.

The planned increase in contributions will represent a rise of 0.7 per cent on the salary or pension, with an equal contribution from the Office. However, even with this increase, the Fund will still be a very, very long way from the rates charged by Swiss health insurance funds – a necessary reference point, since 80 per cent of the expenses covered are incurred in the Geneva region – and will give indisputably better and much more supportive and reliable services.

The Management Committee is currently holding discussions on structural measures, in which Union representatives are fully involved. As stated in the document on programme and budget proposals, measures of this type must combine a revenue-based approach with a cost reduction strategy without impinging on the fundamentals of the Fund that is, as you know, so close to the hearts of all employees, both current and retired.

Debate on structural reform is now well under way and is going to have certain positive results that we have been awaiting for a long time, such as: real negotiation with care providers on charges (which we believe should involve not only the ILO and ITU, but also the whole United Nations family at Geneva); fairer distribution of the cost of social cover among all, according to their means; and better monitoring of the overprotection enjoyed by some and of the risk involved in late payment of some voluntary insurance subscriptions.

However, in any case, a reasonable adjustment of contributions is essential to ensure that the Fund does not remain in the red for too long, which would be fatally damaging to its already depleted resources. The beneficiaries of the Fund, a large number of whom met at the Union's request only a few days ago, have declared their willingness to accept such a move, and the Director-General seeks your consent for it to happen.

In the hope that you will respond positively to this double appeal to preserve such an essential aspect of the conditions of our employment and labour – a Staff Health Insurance Fund worthy of the International Labour Office – I thank you for your kind attention.