

STAFF UNION BULLETIN
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**ILO ABIDJAN: THREE MONTHS OF MOBILIZATION
 FOR THE RIGHT TO EMPLOYMENT**

- On **11 March 2005**, in the presence of the Director General, the Chairperson of the Staff Union Committee [formally drew the attention](#) of the Programme, Financial and Administrative Committee of the ILO Governing Body to the threats hanging over the jobs of our locally recruited Abidjan colleagues and affirmed the « obligation of vigilance and solidarity » incumbent on the Staff Union. The President emphasized the Staff Union's readiness to work closely with the Administration.
- On **8 April 2005**, the Abidjan Staff General Assembly adopted a first resolution demanding in essence that the ILO should preserve jobs and keep all the local staff. The Geneva Staff Union had informed the Administration on **30 March** that discussions could only be held with the representatives of the staff concerned, and that it would act in an advisory capacity. To that end, a [note](#) setting out the various stages involved in a satisfactory procedure was sent to the Regional Director. The Staff Union representatives stressed the need for the Administration to be properly prepared before convening a meeting and the fact that consultations always take time in the case of reorganizations on such a scale.
- On **18 April**, the Staff Union [informed](#) the staff of the opening of discussions. In order not to compromise the chances of the negotiations, it then refrained from any public comment until 6 May, the date when it emerged that the situation had deadlocked at the 25 dismissals envisaged.
- On the opening on **18 April** of the dialogue with the Abidjan Staff Union representatives in Geneva, the Administration tabled a proposal involving **28 dismissals of which 14 were permanent staff**. The indemnities envisaged for permanent staff and fixed term staff whose contracts ended at the end of December were the statutory minimum. For fixed term staff whose contracts expired before 1 December, additional termination indemnities of a few weeks were envisaged. After three days of discussions, the only change accepted was to retain three additional posts in a so-called "light organization". The Staff Union delegation refused to discuss individual dismissals and returned to

Abidjan on **22 April** to report back to the staff. The Administration gave them five working days to decide.

- On the day in question, **28 April**, the Administration insisted on calling an emergency meeting of the JNC to confirm the termination of the contracts of **13 permanent staff**. The Abidjan Staff General Assembly, meeting on **29 April**, adopted a second resolution giving the Administration precise suggestions on the avenues that should be explored. The Geneva Staff Union, which had been consulted about the text, recommended not to demand maintenance of all the posts, as envisaged in the first draft of the resolution, in order to allow negotiation of a social welfare plan.
- The Administration finally agreed to deal with the entire question in the JNC and not just the envisaged dismissals. The JNC met on **5 and 6 May**. The Staff Union first presented the solutions advocated by our Abidjan colleagues, which would avoid a considerable number of dismissals. The Administration did not accept any of them, and insisted on moving without delay to consideration of the individual dismissals.
- At the end of the first day, the deadlock was such that the Staff Union, which had not previously informed the staff as a whole of the dispute, informed the Administration that it would distribute an [information leaflet](#) on the deadlocked discussions at noon the following day.
- The following morning, **6 May**, the Administration returned to the discussions without adding anything new to the suggestions on the table. Individual cases were considered, and the Staff Union then observed that the Administration's proposals (*it was still a case of 25 dismissals*) did not take account of the statutory protection due to permanent staff in the priority allocation of posts. At the end of the day, while regretting the distribution of the leaflets, the Administration informed the Staff Union that it had decided to consider the Staff Union's proposals concerning part-time work and agreed terminations. These options, if implemented, would obviously change the nature and number of dismissals that would ultimately arise.
- Expressions of solidarity flowed in from external Offices in all the regions, the Turin Centre and Retirees. From the **end of April**, the Staff Union's regional committees in America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East informed the staff and called for vigilance.
- On **9 May** the Staff Union Chairperson informed the CABINET orally of the gravity of the situation, emphasized the need to break the deadlock and to proceed in a proper manner to negotiate a social welfare plan, rather than seek to put the dismissals ahead of the search for painless solutions for the staff as a whole.
- Also on **9 May**, the Abidjan Staff General Assembly adopted a resolution mandating the Staff Union representatives in Geneva to continue negotiations on their behalf, stressing the absence hitherto of direct discussions with the staff by the Administration and the inadequacy of the measures envisaged to avoid numerous « social and human tragedies ».
- On **12 May** the Staff Union was informed by the Abidjan Committee of a request for an emergency mission, because they had just learned that a strong headquarters delegation was due to arrive in Abidjan to talk with the staff, without the union being informed. A delegation of two members of the Committee arrived in Abidjan in time to work with the Administration in preparing for individual interviews.

- Indeed it was the Geneva Staff Union, which took charge of the practical organization of the interviews in the least daunting conditions possible for the staff. The regional management informed the staff that no final decision would be taken without it being discussed with the Director General personally. Both delegations returned to Geneva on **21 and 22 May**.
- On **26 May**, the Administration called the Staff Union to the JNC to finalize the report to the Director General in 24 hours. The Staff Union replied that the discussions were clearly still ongoing, and that the JNC was not in a position to provide the Director General with fully informed advice. The Staff Union provided the Administration with its summary notes of the first two days of the JNC meeting, in order to facilitate the drafting of the report of the meeting, a task which fell to the joint secretaries.
- The Administration representatives took it upon themselves to convey to the Director General two sets of notes on the same events, thus omitting the preparation of a report of the JNC. The Staff Union noted that the consultation mechanisms were not respected and that the credibility of the JNC was gravely compromised.
- The list drawn up unilaterally on **27 May** by the Administration for transmission to the Director General envisaged **18 dismissals, including 4 permanent contracts**. The list was not the subject of any consultation with the Staff Union, even though it accompanied notes alleged to record the Administration's side of the discussions held in the JNC.
- On **30 May**, the Administration sent a new delegation to Abidjan tasked with delivering the redundancy notices, without informing the Union. The interviews with the Regional Management and the staff went badly. The medical emergency service had to intervene to evacuate colleagues in a state of shock. Orders were given to private armed guards responsible for security of the premises to bar access to colleagues whose contracts had not been renewed. Access to the meeting room and the library was barred. These measures were lifted after the Staff Union informed the mediator of the imminent danger that such actions represented for people's physical safety.
- The staff refused to accept the notices of non-renewal. The Administration delegation left Abidjan without delivering them, but sent them by email. There were then **13 non-renewals** of contract announced. More substantial supporting measures were envisaged. The letters referred to prior consultation with the social partners and the JNC, the results of which had not been jointly reported to the Director General by the parties as should have been the case, and merely contained information provided by the representatives separately.
- On **3 June**, the Staff Union distributed a [leaflet](#) stating that there was no agreement, and suggesting measures to allow the provisional maintenance of a contractual bond for all (paid leave for a period up to two years). The same day there appeared a circular from the Director General confirming the temporary character of the transfer from Abidjan, and announcing **15 non-renewals of contracts**.
- On **7 June**, the Director General received a tripartite delegation from Côte d'Ivoire. The worker members of the delegation then asked to meet the Staff Union representatives, and were completely taken aback when they read the text of the letters of the non-renewal of contract. They had understood from what the Director General had said that there would be no dismissals but simply non-renewal of temporary contracts (technically there is no redundancy, even if the case law of the ILO Administrative Tribunal likens non-renewal

of a fixed-term contract to redundancy which must be justified). On **15 June**, the Staff Union tersely informed the staff by email about what seemed to be more than just a misunderstanding.

- On **10 June**, the CCISUA General Assembly adopted a [motion of support](#) to the ILO staff in Abidjan, and called on the Director General not to send a wrong message across the rest of the Common System. Political troubles in Ethiopia (where the ILO Regional Office was to be moved) had led to 26 deaths in Addis Ababa on **8 June 2005**. On **13 June**, the Staff Union issued [a leaflet supplementing](#) the information under its duty to inform the staff on the progress of negotiations. Several workers representatives to the Conference asked the Director General to find a satisfactory solution to the dispute.
- On **24 June**, the Abidjan Committee informed the Staff Union Committee that a new mission of Administration representatives had come to Abidjan and following those discussions, the situation had improved considerably. The benefits granted to staff whose contracts could not be renewed were increased. The Administration took active steps with all the United Nations agencies in Côte d'Ivoire to relocate the staff. Positive contacts were made with the Resident Coordinator. Efforts were made to employ supernumerary staff on technical cooperation projects.
- On **21 July 2005**, the Abidjan staff passed a vote of thanks to the Staff Union for the way in which it had led the efforts to save jobs and took the opportunity to convey its gratitude to the other unions and associations of the agencies represented in Côte d'Ivoire for the action they had taken.

It thus took two months to go from 28 firm dismissals to 13 non-renewals of contracts combined with active job-seeking measures by the Office, especially a personalized approach aimed at finding the least bad solution for each staff member concerned ... an approach which the Staff Union had been advocating since 30 March 2005!

NOTE

ABIDJAN – REORGANIZATION – CONDUCT OF DISCUSSIONS

1. Contracts: ensure that all contracts are extended for the whole duration of the negotiations – at least two months.
2. Information: send a written message to all staff concerned on the decisions taken, and the operations to follow with deadlines.
3. Structure: Describe in detail the content of the organizational structure following the reorganization process (Dakar, Abidjan, Addis)
4. Functions: establish vacancy announcements with required grades and qualifications for each of the posts resulting from the reorganization (Dakar, Abidjan, Addis)
5. Stakeholders: The discussion must take place with Abidjan union representation supported by the Geneva Committee and the 3rd Vice-Chairperson (Africa) in conditions which allow reporting to the grass roots and obtaining their agreement.
6. Staff affected: an exhaustive and detailed list of the staff likely to be affected should be drawn up jointly, and the characteristics to be taken into consideration – including length of service, qualifications, dependants, initial training, capacity to develop, etc. It is also essential to hold individual interviews with each of the staff so as better to assess their potential, including by means of training and outside Abidjan.
7. Possible redeployment: None of the posts retained in Abidjan should be filled by external recruitment. The support posts necessitated by the transfer of the Dakar team and the establishment of the Office in Addis should be offered as a priority to Abidjan staff who are qualified or capable of qualifying, by plain redeployment (local status at the new duty station) after obtaining the agreement of the Senegalese and Ethiopian authorities (which in the opinion of the Staff Union is not necessary, as “local” conditions are assessed on a cases by case basis outside Geneva). Colleagues affected have a priority right to recruitment in application of the Staff Regulations.
8. Termination of contract: For colleagues whose employment is to be terminated, the maximum possible should be done (redundancy).

30.3.2005