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

(294th Session – November 2005)

Mr Chairman,
Members of the Committee,
Mr Director General,

It is an honour for me as a union representative to be able to speak to you today. I am speaking for the first time on behalf of a single Staff Union representing all the staff of the International Labour Organization, following a recent merger decision by the Staff Unions of the ILO and the Turin Centre.

For workers all over the world, this body, an extension of the Governing Body, which itself derives its authority from the International Labour Conference, is a bastion where the universal desire for social peace and justice can find its expression. Social dialogue and collective bargaining are your common currency. But the constant search for consensus between the social partners aimed at finding measures to protect the quality of the employment relationship is unfortunately not much in evidence in the way in which the United Nations system functions.

My predecessors here have in recent years repeatedly said that the determination of the International Civil Service Commission, the ICSC, to downgrade conditions of work for staff within the system would inevitably result in the loss of everything that has been the real strength of the United Nations over the last few decades – that is, the principle of recruiting the best, under the best conditions of service, and with guaranteed independence.

The distortion of the methods used to calculate salaries, the undermining of the rules which have created the international civil service, through indifference or with the active encouragement of members of the United Nations General Assembly, without any real consultations with staff representatives, will logically result sooner or later in the transformation

of the United Nations into a subcontracting agency, and this will be the death knell of an independent international civil service.

But in the face of this threat, a response is being organized. Last September, representatives of United Nations staff held their second inter-organization trade union symposium within these walls. Staff unions and associations representing more than 80 per cent of the United Nations' staff and representatives of their two major federations spent three days discussing the best ways of joining forces to combat the bureaucratic monster which the ICSC has become.

The formula for calculating salaries is being challenged more and more often, and the recent case brought by our colleagues in Costa Rica, who have been badly hit by their loss of purchasing power, is but one example of a growing rejection of the "cut-price", privatized public service which some would impose on us. The attempts at intimidation directed at international civil servants, including the threat to convert their pension system into a savings fund and introduce as yet undefined performance-related pay in place of salaries based on levels of responsibility, are only enhancing solidarity among members of staff who are becoming less resigned.

The ILO, within its areas of competence, is an exception to the general absence of social dialogue in the United Nations system. Will we, in five years from now, resemble a certain little village in ancient Gaul still holding out against the invading Romans? Come what may, collective bargaining remains a reality among us, and the ethos of trade unionism is evident on every floor of this building. That trade union presence is something we still need today. Even in the ILO, conditions of work and employment have to be constantly defended.

Last spring, our union vigorously defended the right to work of our locally employed colleagues in Abidjan. It will do the same tomorrow to defend the jobs of men and women who risk losing them because of IRIS. We obviously cannot stand by while colleagues who have worked here for years lose their place because no training has been planned. Protection of employment and the quality of the employment contract remain the principal objectives of our Union. In the context of the introduction of IRIS, the ILO's administration has given the Staff Union detailed information on the human resources situation. The clarity, transparency and accuracy of this information bode well for future follow-up discussions.

As I speak to you here, about 400 women and men employed by this Organization, at headquarters and in the field, are working under external collaboration contracts. These categories, "external" and "internal", are puzzling. How many of these employees have contracts which offer no social protection for sickness, maternity, or pension rights – despite the fact that their continuing employment proves that theirs are genuine posts? Despite the repeated assurances of the Human Resources Department that it can manage the situation, we see little progress in this area.

After eight months of difficult discussions, a review of the collective agreement on recruitment and selection is under way. We hope that it will be possible to submit to you some amendments to the relevant provisions of the Staff Regulations next March. You will find more details of this in the document GB.294/PFA/16 under the heading "Sound and effective policies and procedures for recruitment, placement and career progression". We have high hopes of this

document, as we are far from happy with the current conditions of recruitment and selection, which are lacking in fairness and transparency.

The Human Resources Department highlights the increase in the number of women at the P5 grade, and we can only welcome this. But we regret that there are no statistics on the application of gender policy in the field. We hope that such data will be made available to you next March.

As regards the issue of mobility, we are surprised at the vindictive tone of paragraph 17 in the document I have just referred to. The Staff Union was consulted on the content of the new mobility policy document, and the administration has incorporated some of our observations. Nevertheless, the policy presented to the staff contains a number of unfortunate turns of phrase – despite the fact that the Staff Regulations are quite clear on this matter and require no addition if all that is wanted is an improvement in the current policy. Success in anything is not achieved through threats, but rather by gaining the support of everyone for the objectives that have been established. With this in mind, and in order to clarify the possible implications of the new policy, we will be asking HRD to organize an information meeting to allow an exchange of views with our colleagues.

It was from this document that we learned that a new staff appraisal system was under development. To date, there has been no discussion with the administration on this question, which has been ongoing since 2001.

We are somewhat taken aback by the sudden sense of urgency which has apparently seized the administration in its desire to inform you of a new staff appraisal programme which it has not yet discussed with the Staff Union – while taking its time with the general introduction of Personal Development Plans, which ought to be part and parcel of any staff appraisal system. Career development and staff training are the keys to the excellent service provided by the staff, our colleagues – who are, as we are constantly told, this Organization's principal resource.

Protection of employment, the quality of employment contracts, the painful birth of IRIS, training, staff appraisals, career planning – these are all questions which, if the collective bargaining machinery fails to come up with satisfactory answers, could lead ultimately to the sort of response by the Staff Union and ILO employees with which we defended the jobs of our colleagues in Abidjan.

Another important item on your agenda, not for the first time, concerns the ILO Administrative Tribunal (ILOAT).

I am referring to an amendment which would grant staff unions and associations a direct right of action by representative staff associations in cases affecting their own rights recognized by applicable staff regulations or rules of organizations for which the ILOAT has jurisdiction, and the right of intervention by any other association with identical interests.

Regrettably, the proposal that has been put before you makes no reference to the previous undertaking made by the Office which would give the Staff Union a right of action before the Tribunal in cases affecting rights recognized under the Staff Regulations for the staff as a whole or for a discrete category of staff, despite the fact that this was favoured by the Tribunal itself.

These provisions are a far cry from what was agreed with the Legal Adviser, details of which are set out in the document GB.286/PFA/17/2 from the Governing Body's March 2003 session, referring as they do to "the initiative of the Office" concerning cases "where (a) the Union's own legal rights or prerogatives are allegedly being impinged upon; and (b) where a regulatory or quasi-regulatory decision affects staff as a whole or a discrete category or categories of staff".

We have already received messages from representatives of staff associations of organizations for which the ILOAT has jurisdiction, including the two federations representing United Nations staff, FICSA and CCISUA, strongly criticizing this text – including the proposed payment in advance by associations as an insurance against arbitrary rulings. This seems so ludicrous that one is surprised it was ever put forward.

Before concluding, we would like once again to talk about the post of legal adviser of the Staff Union. Our Staff Union has a secretariat which it funds *entirely* from membership subscriptions, except for one post of secretary to help run the collective bargaining machinery.

The members of the secretariat have always had ILO contracts, just as the staff working for the inter-union federations of the United Nations have had United Nations contracts funded by the federations. At the ILO, which should be setting an example, this question has still to be resolved, and our legal adviser is still employed under a precarious contract. The discussions on this question that took place at our last AGM identified a number of promising approaches. These will – let us hope – allow us to carry on a dialogue with representatives of the administration, which has so far shown itself very little disposed to dialogue on a matter that is crucial to the principle of freedom of association – that is, the right of every union to organize itself as it sees fit within the framework of the applicable law, in this case, the law governing the international civil service.

Our administration here is now talking about ethical standards, and has set up – without, incidentally, any Staff Union involvement – a working party to examine this issue. Precarious employment, delays and cost overruns with IRIS, recruitment and promotion procedures lacking transparency, immunity for incompetent managers, deteriorating working conditions, unequal opportunities and treatment based on gender and type of recruitment – these are among the many issues which we intend to bring to the attention of the working party.

In the hope of swift progress, then, we will endeavour to carry on social dialogue which should set the standard within our Organization.

Thank you.