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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**

(301th Session – March 2008)

Mr Chairperson,
Director-General,
Members of the Governing Body,
Dear colleagues and others present here today,

A wise woman once told me, “I know what I know ... But I am also smart enough to know that there is plenty that I don’t know”.

As a relatively “new” ILO official, tasked with chairing the ILO Staff Union, I quickly recognized that there was a great deal about the history of labour relations in the ILO that I did not know. I have thus committed myself, through discussions with more senior colleagues and former officials, consulting the Union’s archives and reading back issues of *Union Magazine*, to better understanding the history of the Union, which in just two years will celebrate its 90th anniversary.

In doing so, I have come across numerous statements of past chairpersons of the Staff Union. What was perhaps most surprising to me was the fact that many of the challenges we face as a Union today were very similar to those faced by our predecessors.

I do not intend to repeat the past statements of past Presidents today, but would prefer to focus my presentation on five priority issues, with which I hope that you, the members of this Committee, can help the ILO and its staff through your deliberations and decisions. These are five areas where we are working, both as the Staff Union and in collaboration with the administration to produce results. Several items are directly linked to papers that have been presented for your consideration.

1. Safety and security in the field (GB.301/PFA/19/1)

First, and without doubt foremost among the Union's concerns, is the safety and security of our colleagues in the field.

In the horrific events of 11 December 2007, the ILO lost one dear colleague, Abderahim Hanniche, and saw two others hospitalized with bodily injuries. It must be said that all staff who were there at the time of the attack were seriously affected. If they did not all seek medical or other assistance at the time, they could very possibly need it in the future, and consideration is rightly being given to the longer term needs of these colleagues.

I want here to commend all those who reached out to our staff and their families in the aftermath of the attack in Algiers.

I must first acknowledge the support provided by the Department of Safety and Security's Critical Incident Stress Management Unit. It immediately sent two highly qualified counsellors, who stayed on for several weeks. Psychological care for the survivors of such violence is essential and this is a tangible example of what the resources you approve for the UN Security Management System do for our people in times of need.

I also thank our colleagues on the ground for their outstanding contributions under distressing circumstances. The Officer-in-Charge in ILO–Algiers took the lead in responding to the attack by giving vital on-site assistance to the security officer and recovery staff. Together with the representative despatched by the Director-General, he gave comfort to Rahim's family, visited injured staff in the hospital, and passed on critical information and assistance to all those affected. HRD, the Regional Office and CABINET all in turn played a role in managing the response to the crisis.

In such times of difficulty, we enjoy an excellent working relationship with the administration. Day-to-day disagreements are readily set aside, and the free exchange of information to the benefit of all affected staff quickly becomes the order of the day.

As the attack in Algiers has shown, the United Nations has itself become a target. So our staff are at risk not merely because of where they live or what possessions they may have, but merely for having answered a calling: for committing themselves to the ideals and principles of the United Nations.

On policy matters, the ILO staff is represented through our international federation in the Inter-Agency Security Management Network. We are committed to strengthening this presence, and are exploring ways to submit recommendations to bolster staff safety and security throughout the UN system. In this regard, an important question for the Union is: "What happens to locally recruited staff in a crisis"?

Neither bombs nor bullets discriminate between locally or internationally recruited staff. In situations of crisis, safety and security mechanisms must not discriminate

between categories either. Of course, improvements in the benefits available to national staff carry heavy resource implications. But it is important – as the global safety and security system comes in for review by the Secretary-General – to close the gap in treatment between local staff and those recruited internationally.

The cornerstone of staff security is training. We are pleased that Staff Union representatives are systematically included in all training sessions organized in the regions and at headquarters. Special sessions specifically for staff representatives, in conjunction with the Staff Union's regional meetings, are currently in preparation.

We appreciate the special mention of technical cooperation projects in the document submitted by the Office to this Committee. The issue of non-compliance with minimum operating security standards in "several" project offices has also come to the attention of the Union. How many of our project offices are fully MOSS compliant? How many meet minimum safety standards, including fire safety standards? We believe that all ILO offices should meet these standards to ensure that the staff who are delivering services to you do so in as safe and secure an environment as possible.

We would also like to see a system for addressing the issues that may arise if an Office has to be temporarily relocated or closed whether on security grounds or for other reasons. Such a system could include the establishment of a "social plan" to be implemented – according to criteria negotiated in advance, rather than on an ad hoc basis whenever the ILO is faced with a crisis – to manage the relocation process with a minimum of disruption during an already difficult and stressful time.

2. *Field structure review (GB.301/PFA/4)*

The second issue I would like to raise is the Review of the ILO Field Structure (GB.301/PFA/4). Again, I do not want to spend too much time on the theoretical. Rather, I prefer to focus on the form of the consultations, as well as the concrete future implications of the proposed restructuring on ILO staff.

The Union here in Geneva had a chance to provide the consultants with our views regarding the field structure review. During this encounter, we encouraged them to also consult with our representatives in those field offices which they would be visiting, offering to set up these meetings if needed.

Unfortunately, according to the feedback we have received from our own representative structure in the field, in most instances these encounters did not take place at all. Of those few who did have the opportunity to meet with the consultants, we learned that the meetings were not originally programmed as part of the mission, required staff to participate together with management, or were of extremely short duration. It is regrettable that in the vast majority of cases they were not able to receive the views of the local Union representatives, who are a crucial source of information for any analysis of the structure and functioning of ILO field offices.

The Union contacted our regional representatives, whose inputs were compiled into a document outlining our main concerns regarding any reform of the field structure. Some of the major points raised included:

- (1) *Safeguarding* employment security in all offices, with necessary training provided for existing staff to cover any new tasks, with special attention given to locally recruited staff.
- (2) *Improving* the appropriate use of employment contracts within the Office, and not increasing precarious employment.
- (3) *Exploring* possibilities for training, career development and mobility among General Service staff and National Officers, particularly in cases where status of ILO Offices may change.
- (4) *Promoting* equality of treatment between technical cooperation staff and those on the regular budget, beginning with recruitment issues.
- (5) *Increasing* accountability of line managers and responsible chiefs of technical units through clear identification of responsibilities.
- (6) *Consulting* with Staff Union representatives at all levels during the field, structure review.
- (7) *In the context of UN reform* which is being felt throughout the field, the ILO must promote upward harmonization of terms and conditions and not race to the bottom.

While the Staff Union supports a more effective – and if necessary a more flexible – ILO presence, we must be careful that this does not have adverse impacts on the security and performance of staff. For example, the recruitment of a team of national coordinators which the paper argues can be “established and discontinued according to need”, should not take place before we analyse fully the situation of – and problems faced by – the current team of national coordinators.

Reference to an increase in the ratio of Professional to General Service staff positions is also a matter of concern. According to our numbers, while the overall numbers of P staff have remained relatively stable since 1998, we have already witnessed a reduction of 16 per cent in the General Service, with the decrease in the field only slightly less than that in headquarters.

To say that a reduction in the ratio of G to P is “desirable” by itself – without an in-depth analysis of the needs and available resources in an office – does not do service to the General Service staff, who see their work devalued and their career prospects limited. It does not do service to Professional staff, many of whom are working to full capacity, and who rely on the professional assistance of colleagues in the General Service to support their work. It does not do service to managers, who are forced to reduce staff and to rely on the remaining colleagues to take on the extra work.

The Staff Union appreciated the opportunity to discuss this paper in advance with representatives of CABINET and HRD. It is our sincere hope that this exchange represents the beginning of an ongoing dialogue between the Union – including our representatives in the field – and the administration. A good deal of work remains to be

done to review, discuss and consult over the concrete measures proposed in the Office paper. We hope that the Guidelines on Managing Change and Restructuring Processes, which took months of negotiation to put together, will be put to good use in this, and in any circumstance where we find ourselves faced with restructuring.

3. ILOAT

In the paper you will be considering on the Statute of the ILO Administrative Tribunal, in particular relating to oral proceedings before the Tribunal, the Union would like to bring to your attention that this proposed amendment, as the Office document correctly points out, was part of a much broader discussion on the need to reform and modernize the Tribunal.

This included consideration of the possibility for any representative staff union or association to bring a direct complaint before the Tribunal, as has been the case for years in the majority of member States, whenever we are faced with an issue which affects our rights as a union.

This principle has already been negotiated and agreed with the administration, and is reflected in the Collective Agreement on Conflict Prevention and Resolution. All that remains to give effect to this clause of the collective agreement is for you to approve the text of the amendment proposed in March 2005 (GB.292/PFA/20/2), and then for the Conference to adopt these amendments.

You are the representatives of the main global actors in industrial relations, and as such you have an opportunity to resolve this issue. If not in the current sitting, then you may wish to request a paper addressing the issue in the next session.

We ask for your support to enable the full implementation of one of a very limited number of collective agreements that exist within the international civil service.

4. Recruitment, Assignment and Placement System (RAPS)

While there is no document before you specifically addressing the subject of recruitment and selection and the Recruitment, Assignment and Placement System (RAPS), this is an issue of significant concern to ILO staff, and obviously to the Staff Union.

When it was first introduced, RAPS was described as simplifying the recruitment and placement process with a view to meeting both the staffing requirements of the Organization and the work/life balance requirements of the staff. It was – and still is – expected to promote succession planning, talent management, career development and effective and timely prospecting.

The major priority for the Union is to ensure that any new system will increase the transparency and objectivity of the recruitment and selection process. It is for this reason that the Union has been engaged with the administration on the renegotiation of the collective agreement on recruitment and selection. We signed a framework agreement late last year, and we are now working on the more detailed procedures, which we hope to have agreed before the next Governing Body.

As for the RAPS process itself, the Staff Union raised a number of concerns regarding the proposed system earlier this year. It is important that I mention here that these concerns seem to have been largely taken on board by our colleagues in HRD. We have requested, and are looking forward to, the opportunity to review the overall process with HRD once this first exercise is completed.

Looking to the future, it could be potentially very interesting and useful for a staff representative to be more involved in the implementation of the new HR strategy. For example, the staffing review which takes place now between HRD and the manager prior to the RAPS being launched may perhaps benefit from the presence of a staff representative. This could increase staff buy-in to the process, improve transparency, and enable the Office to perhaps resolve certain cases of precarious staff.

5. *Staff Union Legal Adviser*

The efforts of the Committee in addressing all of the issues outlined above – among many others – are supported by a committed and extremely competent secretariat, including our Legal Adviser.

I know that when I began my intervention, I said that I did not want to repeat the statements from previous Staff Union chairpersons. However, I will beg your indulgence to repeat a message that has been regularly delivered in your presence by my three most recent predecessors, but on which we continue to seek a solution, four years on.

Again, this requires that I look back on the history of social dialogue within the Office. Certainly the Union has had its share of “ups and downs” with the administration. This is true of any industrial relations situation.

Fortunately, and I am very pleased to tell you this, we continue to engage in a regular dialogue with the ILO administration. We do not always agree on every point but, where we have differences of opinion, we are professional in how we go about resolving those differences. Indeed, it was not until the current Director-General that the ILO staff enjoyed a level of formalized collective bargaining in the Office.

We now are in a situation where we have a responsibility to our members, and to all ILO staff to defend our right to bargain collectively. The ILO Staff Union has engaged the services of a legal adviser since 2003. In that time, he has provided professional legal advice to the Staff Union Committee in support of collective bargaining or policy

discussions, and has assisted in the handling of grievances as part of the Legal Support Unit of the Union.

We are asking for a regular, formal ILO employment contract for the Legal Adviser.

This is necessary given the fact that, due to our status within the international civil service, we cannot establish the Union under the jurisdiction of a member State. This reality has been confirmed in a recent decision by the ILO Administrative Tribunal, which stated: "Many countries require other formalities including, sometimes, registration under the relevant domestic law. Those laws cannot apply to a staff association or union the membership of which is restricted to international civil servants".

The legal framework for the employment relationship and industrial relations in the ILO is set out by the Standards of Conduct for the international civil service, decisions by the International Civil Service Commission and the Governing Body, the Staff Regulations, collective agreements and Tribunal jurisprudence.

Due to this unique circumstance:

- with the exception of the legal adviser, the Union has hired its own secretariat staff – using ILO contracts – over the past 40 years;
- many other staff unions, associations and federations throughout the international civil service also use the contracts of their agency to engage staff.;
- the ILO has allowed independent entities to exist within the Office and for their staff to be engaged through ILO contracts.

Today, because of this very special situation, the Union must be able to engage staff under an employment contract that has its legal basis within the international civil service, via the International Labour Organization.

To be clear: the Union is not asking the ILO to act as employer. The Union is ready to negotiate with management on the obligations that it could undertake for its own staff.

The Union will continue to maintain its independence by financing the position of the Legal Adviser from the Union's funds, collected through membership dues and accountable to democratic decision-making via our Annual General Meetings.

It is our sincere hope that we will be able to find a solution to this issue in the very near future.

Thank you for your attention.
