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Statement by the Chairperson of the Staff Union Committee

347th Session of the Governing Body (14 March 2023)

Chairperson, Director-General, members of the Governing Body, dear colleagues and all of you here today, in the room or online,

I address you today with great humility and strength as the Chairperson of the Staff Union Committee.

With humility, because this opportunity that is given to the Chairperson of the Staff Union Committee to address the Governing Body twice a year is a chance to give a voice to the 3,600 staff members serving this Organization. In doing so, I certainly do not take the expectations of my colleagues lightly and I thank you for giving them your attention by listening to me now. This humility is also what we need to fulfil the mandate that you have entrusted to us. It is this humility and devotion that is needed for our colleagues who are continuing to work, whether in countries in situations of conflict, war, economic or social collapse, in situations of human rights violations, or even, as happened recently, those colleagues who have lost loved ones in earthquakes.

I also take the floor with strength. Strength given to me by a Union that represents almost two thirds of the staff, at headquarters and in the field, in all categories. It is therefore with the strength of that mandate that I share with you the resolution that was adopted by a large majority at our general meeting this past February: the Resolution on the impact on salaries of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) Reform. This resolution calls on the Organization to exercise its duty of care towards affected colleagues, as the decrease could represent the equivalent of up to a month and a half's salary in annual earnings. This resolution demands information to be communicated transparently and accurately. It also reserves the right to examine the legal validity of the ILO Administration's decision, which the Union is currently doing. Lastly, it gives me the mandate to urge you to instruct the Office to work for ICSC governance reform, in accordance with the fundamental principles of the ILO, including collective bargaining, and with the participation of the federations of United Nations staff associations and unions. Remember this when you read document GB.347/PFA/INF/11 on Matters relating to the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO: Amendments to the Statute of the International Civil Service Commission and update on the review of the jurisdictional set-up of the United Nations common system. I will also come back to this document briefly later on.

The strength that I have today is also the strength of a Union that embodies the principles and the DNA of our Organization, by engaging in constructive social dialogue with the Administration, by working to prevent and resolve conflicts and to prevent occupational risks, by negotiating staff regulations and collective agreements, so that our rules keep up with the times and the fundamental rights at work.

Since my predecessor, Carlos Carrión Crespo – who I salute and thank – spoke before you last November, the Staff Union has continued to hold discussions and negotiations, with the wind in our sails provided by a new Administration and the commitments made by the Director-General. As a result, we have made progress towards a new parental leave policy, for which we

still need to finalize the provisions of a collective agreement in the coming weeks. We have also drawn up a new policy on flexible working arrangements. Fundamentally, these negotiations enable the Office to align itself with the other United Nations agencies and funds, they are also based on the principle that the rules should apply to all colleagues, however their contracts are financed and wherever they are, in an inclusive, human-centred manner. In form, these negotiations have been conducted in a “win-win” spirit, identifying shared interests and constantly seeking solutions that take all interests into account. I commend the Administration, in particular the Human Resources Development Department, on this progress and on the implementation of social dialogue.

I would now like to share with you, as is customary, the thoughts of the staff on the items on the agenda of this Governing Body session, and their potential implications on our working conditions.

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Governing Body, the staff would like you to consider the documents submitted to you here for information or adoption with determination, courage and kindness.

Indeed, it is with determination that you must ensure that the programme and budget has the necessary resources, particularly human resources, for its implementation. We cannot say often enough that it might be dangerous to do more with less, and that the ILO's main resource are its women and men, with all their diversity and expertise. The Director-General's programme and budget calls for a return to the basics: social justice. We are often apprehensive of additional efforts that we are asked to make, to deal with non-renewals of retirements, budgetary transfers that turn “staff costs” into “non-staff costs” – that is to say externalization, through the increasing use of consultants rather than staff employed according to the rules. In the service of social justice, it is important to reaffirm that labour is not a commodity.

Many of the documents to be discussed that do not theoretically have budgetary implications need to be viewed from the perspective of their human implications, including the promotion of a safe and healthy working environment as a new fundamental principle and right at work, measures concerning the organization of future sessions of the Governing Body and other meetings, the Global Coalition for Social Justice and the ILO Strategy on knowledge and innovation. To be able to achieve these goals, the Office needs to have a structure in place – and this still seems very unclear to many colleagues as well as to the Staff Union – that can also build on a solid foundation, valuing and providing opportunities to colleagues with in-house experience and skills. Favouring calls for applications and competitions does indeed seem to have taken a back seat in the ongoing recruitment processes for a number of posts.

It is also with determination that I ask you to consider document GB.347/PFA/INF/11 on “Matters relating to the Administrative Tribunal of the ILO: Amendments to the Statute of the International Civil Service Commission and update on the review of the jurisdictional set-up of the United Nations common system”. Our position remains the same regarding the legal basis for the application of the changes to the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) Statute. The ILO Administrative Tribunal has declined to give its opinion, as it cannot be an advisory body, and only a ruling following a petition to the Tribunal would provide certainty on the legal validity of the division of powers between the ICSC and the United Nations General Assembly and on the application of the methodology for calculating the post adjustment. This document also presents the follow-up to the second report of the Secretary-General on the review of the jurisdictional set-up of the United Nations common system, namely, as far as we are concerned, the jurisdiction and the recognition of the ILO Administrative Tribunal. I cannot

repeat the points that my predecessor, Carlos, made to you in November. He did so with all his legal expertise, in a detailed and well-founded manner. I can only reiterate the importance of preserving “our” Tribunal, the operation and excellence of which make it an example for many courts. It is with your determination that the Office will be able to continue to make its voice heard in the work of the United Nations secretariat.

Let me now appeal to your goodwill. Admittedly, this is unusual in a context such as this speech. And it is even more unusual given that I am appealing to your goodwill with reference to document GB.347/INS/16, “Report on developments relating to the resolution concerning the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine from the perspective of the mandate of the International Labour Organization”. Paragraphs 39 and 40 do indeed refer to the situation of ILO staff in Ukraine and the Russian Federation, and confirm the arrangements made for the process of relocating staff to Kyiv, the maintenance of the operational capacity of the Moscow office and the duty of care at the heart of the approach adopted in the region. The Staff Union would like to acknowledge again the support provided by the Office, its security services and administration. The Staff Union would also like to ask for your kindness in recognizing the dedication of our colleagues who have continued to work and to reinvent themselves to be able to carry out their tasks and to be present, despite difficult personal and professional circumstances.

There is one more document to which I would like to refer: GB.347/PFA/14 “Progress report on the implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for 2022–25”. The reading and subsequent discussion of this document requires courage and determination. One of the reasons why you elected Mr Hounbo was his commitment to harmonizing the working conditions of the staff. This agenda gave us a lot of hope. It is indeed untenable that more than half of the staff is today employed on the basis of precarious contracts and that these differences have persisted for many years. This reality and its professional and personal implications have already been reported to you by my predecessors, and you can find more details in the results of the survey conducted by the Staff Union among all of our colleagues last year. Tackling these inequalities cannot wait any longer: do you find it normal, when we talk about the International Labour Office and social justice, that more and more of our colleagues sign year after year, sometimes for more than 25 years, contracts of one year maximum duration, and do not have the same rights as their colleagues with regular budget positions? The administration and the Staff Union must be able to engage in negotiations that will lead to harmonization and an improvement in working conditions. An ILO official is an official, whether his or her contract is financed by development cooperation funds or by the annual contributions of our Member States. We have a duty to deliver results so that we can continue to carry out the tasks you entrust to us.

Ladies and gentlemen members of the Governing Body, the administration and the Staff Union are determined to engage in these negotiations, and we have agreed with the Administration that we will also examine the rules on mobility. But I will not hide the fact that these negotiations can be daunting because they have stalled for too long. We need you to give us a mandate to think outside the box, and to implement courageous and innovative solutions that will position the ILO as a leader in the promotion of working conditions that respect the dignity of all and value diversity in all its forms.

To conclude, allow me to share a personal reflection. When I took up office as Chairperson of the ILO Staff Union last December, one of the remarks I often heard from my colleagues was: “Is the speech at the Governing Body going to be okay? Aren’t you scared?” Yes, ladies and gentlemen, you are certainly intimidating! Intimidating because of your collective power to make decisions that could potentially “impose” on us, the ILO staff, an unworkable programme

and budget, ever more precarious working conditions, or a mandate that we would find meaningless. Intimidating because it is after all rare that we are able to share our feelings and opinions with you.

I come to you, however, admittedly a little anxious, but confident. Confident in your determination, your courage, and above all in your kindness, towards me and towards all the staff for whom I speak.

Thank you for your attention.