



**Staff Union**  
of the International Labour Organization

**Syndicat du personnel**  
de l'Organisation internationale du Travail

**Sindicato del personal**  
de la Organización Internacional del Trabajo

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**Statement by the Chairperson of the Staff Union  
to the Programme, Financial and Administrative Section of the Governing Body  
(335th Session, 19 March 2019)**

Madam Chairperson, whom I congratulate on her election,  
Director-General,  
Ladies and gentlemen, members of the Governing Body,  
Dear colleagues.

It is my honour to deliver this address as President elect of the ILO Staff Union, representing almost 70 per cent of the ILO staff at headquarters and in the field.

I must, however, begin by sharing the pain felt by the staff of several other United Nations organizations who lost 21 of their colleagues in the tragic air crash that occurred in Ethiopia on 10 March. Whenever a member of our staff passes away, every one of us in the United Nations family feels distraught.

At a time such as this, it might seem futile, even inappropriate, to speak of other matters, but such is the duty that I must nevertheless endeavour to fulfil.

Today, it is both with some humility but also with pride and emotion that I speak to this assembled body as we celebrate the Centenary of the ILO, an institution which, I truly believe, is dear to us all.

The humility I feel in addressing you stems from the thought of all the Governing Body sessions that have been held since the beginning of the 20th century, where your predecessors, and you ladies and gentlemen, the delegates representing workers, employers and governments, have done everything they can, year after year, to establish, refine and strengthen the mandate of the oldest of all United Nations organizations, so that peace, social justice and decent work remain the constant focus of the major debates confronting global society, 100 years after its creation.

I am also proud and moved to be standing here before you as the staff representative, to bring to your attention the concerns they are facing, just as all the women and men who have preceded me in this capacity have done for nigh on 100 years, ever since 1920.

Dialogue, innovation, adaptation, courage and perseverance, these have been and still are the principles and values that guide all those whose role it is to further the Organization's objectives. Surely their determination and commitment warrant that we should rise to the occasion and, despite the heavy schedule ahead of us, mark the day in a manner worthy of what our Organization has achieved over the past century.

The staff at headquarters greatly appreciated being involved, on 22 January 2019, in the official launch of the celebrations, and are already looking forward to the ceremony in April in which the field staff in particular will participate.

The staff representatives have also been very sensitive to the publication of the report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work, whose main objective has been to provide guidelines for building a better future. In the current global context, that would be no mean feat.

The report, which is directed at each and every stakeholder in the world of work, affords an ambitious vision of what that world might look like in the course of the 21st century. The ILO staff representatives have been quick to decipher the key messages that the report conveys, such as the importance of placing the human element at the centre of our concerns, of guaranteeing access to lifelong learning and of strengthening social protection. They would like to think that the report applies also to the men and women who are first in line as they work untiringly at headquarters and in the field so that all the Organization's principles and values are handed down through the ages. You can imagine how difficult they would find it to understand that the ILO does not practice what it preaches when it comes to its own staff.

It looks, however, as if we may still have to wait some time for that, considering that some of the documents submitted to this session would suggest to the staff representatives that, however ambitious and forward-looking the report on the future of work may be, it has not yet quite penetrated the minds of those who drafted and submitted it.

I refer specifically to documents GB.335/PFA/6 and GB.335/PFA/7, which were already discussed yesterday but whose recommendations – especially the third recommendation in document GB.335/PFA/6 – would seem to be inspired more by the ILO's desire to generate profit by outsourcing more and more of the work than by any genuine attempt to provide effective social protection for the staff as a whole. The recommendation goes against the assertion we find in the report to the effect that “the future of work requires a strong and responsive social protection system based on the principles of solidarity and risk sharing”. Just in case the message conveyed in my earlier statements – and also, in fact, in those of my predecessors – has not got through, I will reiterate it: any attempt to undermine the Staff Health Insurance Fund for reasons other than the interests of its members will be firmly resisted. The ILO is deeply attached to its health system, which is based on the very principles that are promoted in the Global Commission's report.

I refer also to document GB.335/PFA/1 containing the Programme and Budget proposals for 2020–21, where the staff can at last discover the, in their view, greatly exaggerated amounts that have been spent on assessing operational procedures allowing “the elimination of a number of clerical support functions, releasing resources for ... front-line technical work”. It is of course not the

decision itself that is being challenged, since it stems from a decision-making prerogative that they do not question. What does give cause for alarm, rather, is what the document does not say.

It makes no reference, for instance, to the human context in which my colleagues evolve – since from now on we are putting the human element at the heart of the debate – or to the serious impact the decisions taken may have on their professional life, without for example guaranteeing them access to further training so as to have a hope of finding another post. What the document overlooks is the increased workload and added stress for our colleagues who survive in the administrative services, where they are so exhausted that, more and more often, external assistance is required so that they can meet shorter and shorter deadlines that are virtually impossible to attain without their health suffering. What the document ignores is the fact that no support posts are being created in the field to handle the increased number of technical posts in field offices. Meanwhile, from our staff representatives in the field we hear of colleagues on the verge of a breakdown, of the regular downgrading of posts for purely financial reasons, of the virtual lack of recognition for work done. Yes, indeed, here at the ILO it is certainly time for the human element to become once again a central concern.

The Staff Union deplors the endless platitudes to be found throughout the Governing Body documents, which often give only a distorted view of the real working conditions in our Organization. But it must not be forgotten that, behind the proposals ostensibly designed to ensure a streamlined budget, there are above all else men and women. Charity, they say, begins at home. So yes, let's have a programme that really focuses on the human element; let us take this opportunity to set a good example; let us "seize the moment".

Those were my general remarks. I shall now go into a little more detail concerning the very large number of documents that have been submitted to this session for information or for approval, so that you can understand the staff representatives' point of view.

The first three documents I shall comment on relate to the United Nations common system and its now famous – at least in this Organization – International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). I refer to documents GB.335/PFA/13, GB.335/PFA/INF/4 and GB.335/PFA/INF/5.

The Staff Union confirms the information contained in document GB.335/PFA/13 regarding the consultative process, working arrangements and reform of the post adjustment methodology. It does, however, regret that such an important process is moving forward so slowly and that there are some surprising changes in the timetable that the staff representatives see as simple delaying tactics. On the other hand, it does appreciate what it sees as a gesture of appeasement and goodwill, i.e. the decision of the ICSC's new president to send a message to all United Nations staff assuring them of his intention that, under his presidency, the Commission should in future live up to its mandate and its objectives. At the same time – and aware of the irony of the situation – the Staff Union notes with satisfaction that the ICSC, in a, how shall I put it, burst of historically delayed awareness, should finally have decided to incorporate in its own Statute and Rules of Procedure the decisions that the United Nations General Assembly laid down in its 1998 resolution A/53/30. They are never more than 20 years late ...

Regarding document GB.335/PFA/INF/4: *Decisions of the United Nations General Assembly on the report of the International Civil Service Commission for 2018*, it is a matter of regret that the General Assembly always appears far keener to initiate savings which the staff very often end up paying for, rather than adopting ICSC recommendations which, for once, had been properly discussed with the staff federations and had produced a consensus. Adopting those recommendations could have simultaneously satisfied the administrations' need for a flexible body of staff and made working for the United Nations an attractive proposition by guaranteeing a better work–life balance. I am referring here to paragraph 21 of the document.

I would also draw the attention of the ILO's constituents and the members of the ILO Staff Pension Committee to document GB.335/PFA/INF/5, specifically to paragraph 14, which refers to amendments to the Regulations and Rules of the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF) in a manner that could seriously undermine the ILO's representation on the Joint Board. The members of the Governing Body, the administration and the Fund participants will need to be extremely vigilant in ensuring that the Fund is not gradually taken over by other organizations. Once again we are talking about the social protection of the staff, an area where the ILO has always been looked upon as a leading light in the United Nations common system. That must continue.

I shall now turn to the other PFA documents that have direct implications for the staff's employment and working conditions.

Regarding document GB.335/PFA/3 on the headquarters building renovation project, the Staff Union is concerned about the possible consequences of there being a gap between the two phases of the project, especially with respect to the persistent presence of asbestos in the lower parts of the building, the notorious fire hazards and the poor quality of the air. Perhaps you are not aware that many of our colleagues work day in day out on the lower floors of the building, and the Staff Union cannot see why there should be a two-speed occupational safety policy within one and the same Organization. Where it is a matter of the staff's safety, the Staff Union believes that the ILO should first and foremost focus on its currently understaffed human resources so that they can do their job properly, with proper contracts, rather than resort unduly to external companies. That said, we realize that nowadays, though a worker's life may be priceless, once he or she is no longer there the cost is extremely high.

The Staff Union therefore urges the Governing Body to act responsibly when it takes decisions relating to the security, well-being, safety and health of the ILO staff, with due respect for the standards set by the host country and by the United Nations. A worker's life is priceless.

As to document GB.335/PFA/10(Rev.) on amendments to the Staff Regulations, the Staff Union believes that proper consultations were held with the administration and that the document is an appropriate reflection of the outcome. It is, nevertheless, following very closely the discussions being held within the ICSC regarding the review of the methodology for calculating the salaries of the different categories of staff concerned, particularly in the light of the legal disputes and appeals that have surrounded the issue during the past two years.

The Staff Union was particularly interested in document GB.335/PFA/11 on the composition and structure of the ILO staff, given the discussions that are to be held with the administration this year

on the issue of the Organization's increased diversity. In the Staff Union's view, if the question of diversity is to be tackled seriously, the concepts, challenges and central issues involved must be correctly defined from the very start. Diversity among the ILO staff cannot simply be reduced to an assessment of the number of different passports held by the Organization's employees. Moreover, we cannot allow the search for the best person for each post, which is the prime concern of any recruitment process, to be undermined by measures that go against the fundamental principles of non-discrimination embodied in the Charter of the United Nations. Diversity is much more than a matter of hard cash that member States contribute to the Organization. Quite apart from geographical distribution, it comprises gender equality, equality in terms of diversity of social origin, equality among languages and the different socio-occupational groups, integration of persons in situations of disability and non-discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. The administration will at the same time need to promote creative initiatives, which means finding additional resources in order to devise better ways of integrating young workers from every part of the globe so that they can join the Organization and make a useful contribution to it. The Staff Union has already expressed its willingness to engage in any discussion on the subject.

Turning to document GB.335/PFA/12/1 on the proposed amendments to the Statute of the ILO Administrative Tribunal, the Staff Union shares the Tribunal's concerns about anything that might seriously compromise its neutrality and its independence. It is absolutely vital for the staff of the ILO, as well as of all the organizations that come under the Tribunal's jurisdiction, that it should impart justice with complete independence and impartiality.

Finally, the Staff Union would like to say a word about the ILO's duty to honour its mandate in the context of its Centenary celebrations. Anyone who has read all the documents before the Governing Body carefully cannot help but observe that our Organization is at a crossroads. Every document, even the ostensibly least contentious, is contingent to some degree on the United Nations reform, the Global Commission's report on the future of work and the expectation that the ILO should issue a strong statement to mark the Organization's Centenary. These are considerations that are far too important for the staff representatives to ignore. The very wording used in document GB.335/PFA/1 – "change of direction", "reorientation", "reorganization" – leaves no doubt as to the consequences that the decisions involved may have for the staff. The Staff Union has also taken due note of paragraphs 42 to 45 of document GB.335/INS/10 on the United Nations reform, though it regrets the absence of any clear reference to existing labour relations mechanisms, within which all discussions, consultations and negotiations on the possible consequences of the reform for the ILO staff will have to take place.

During the past 100 years, thanks to the resilience of its tripartite Constitution, the Organization has weathered many a storm, and it has always succeeded in finding its rightful place in the United Nations' multiple attempts at integration, while retaining its remarkable and uniquely specific nature. And the ILO staff, too, have always been able to adapt to the new configurations, so long as social dialogue has been conducted in good faith ahead of whatever decisions have had to be taken. The Staff Union therefore trusts that the specific form of labour relations that we have at the ILO, which it sees as inherent in the Organization's DNA, will again prevail throughout this process of reorganization, so that it continues to serve as an example within the United Nations common system and to be conducive to good practice and its ensuing benefits.

What would be the point otherwise of being the oldest member of the United Nations family if it was not respected for its experience and expertise?

Allow me to remind you, as delegates representing the three groups of Workers, Governments and Employers, that the “world parliament of labour” that your predecessors created and nurtured for a 100 years, and which you are perpetuating here today, is unique, worthy of respect and, especially, indispensable. In the interests of decent work, the maintenance of peace and social justice, it is essential that tripartism endure. You are an outstanding example of the benefits of social dialogue within the United Nations which, for all the obstacles and difficulties it entails, brings with it the full beauty and satisfaction of engaging in discussions through which it is possible to devise and conclude agreements and to promote a system of standards that can benefit workers throughout the world. Let this message be heard loud and clear.

For a 100 years, the destinies of the three component parts of this Organization have been irrevocably intertwined. The Organization cannot hope to function if the tripartite stakeholders are unable to find their way to a compromise so as to provide it with guidance. And the Organization cannot function without a competent and committed secretariat and staff to implement decisions. The staff will always stand side by side with the administration and the Organization’s constituents in continuing to promote social justice and decent work. It trusts that the feeling is reciprocated where the staff’s employment and working conditions are concerned.

As members of the staff, we believe that all those who have built the Organization over the years can be proud of what they have achieved, and we hope that the journey will continue for many years to come.

On behalf of the staff, I wish the ILO happy birthday and, above all, many happy returns!

Thank you for your attention.