4th Regional Committee Meeting of the ILO Staff Union for the African Region
(Yaoundé, 30 June – 4 July 2012)

Report of the meeting

I. Introduction

The ILO Staff Union held the 4th Regional Committee Meeting for the African region in Yaoundé, from 30 June to 4 July 2012. The meeting was held at the Djeuga Palace Hotel in Yaoundé, Cameroon. It brought together all the Staff Union representatives in Africa (from ILO offices in Abidjan, Addis Ababa, Algiers, Antananarivo, Cairo, Dakar, Harare, Kinshasa, Lusaka, Pretoria and Yaoundé). Several members of the Staff Union in Yaoundé took an active part in this union meeting.

The meeting was also attended by the Chairperson of the ILO Staff Union Committee (SUC), Mr Christopher Land-Kazlauskas, the Staff Union substitute member for Africa, Mr Mohammed Mwamadzingo, and the Staff Union Legal Adviser, Mr Nicolas Lopez-Armand. For some sections of the meeting, the Staff Union had also invited the administration of the ILO Regional Office for Africa, represented at the meeting by the Regional Director for Africa, Mr Charles Dan. A similar invitation was sent to Mr Paulo Barcia, Director of the Human Resources Department (HRD) at Headquarters, who was represented by Ms Marika Maillot, Senior Human Resources Partner, based in the Regional Office for Africa.

According to the Staff Union Rules (Article 25), this is a statutory meeting that is expected to take place every two years. The principle aim of the meeting is to discuss matters concerning union interests, and the implementation and coordination of the Staff Union’s activities in the corresponding region. The last African regional meeting was held in Dar es Salaam in 2008. In October 2010 a global meeting was held in Geneva bringing together Staff Union representatives from all the ILO field offices in the world.

During the meeting, Staff Union representatives presented reports from their local committees and also discussed the various challenges faced by the staff they represented. The Regional Office for Africa and the Regional HRD partner gave feedback based on progress, or lack of it,
made against the resolutions from past meetings. The Regional HRD Partner also held one-to-one meetings with Staff Union Committee representatives from all offices to follow up on specific issues.

II. Opening ceremony

During the opening ceremony, remarks were made by Mr Serge Bouopda (Staff Union Representative of Yaoundé), Mr Djibril Ndiaye (Staff Union Titular Member for Africa), Ms Dayina Mayenga (Director of the Yaoundé Office), Mr Christopher Land-Kazlauskas (Chairperson of the ILO Staff Union Committee), and Mr Charles Dan (Regional Director for Africa).

In his address, Mr Bouopda, on behalf of Yaoundé’s SUC, expressed his humility and gratitude for the opportunity to be the host of the Regional SUC meeting. He welcomed all and wished the meeting success.

Mr Ndiaye expressed condolences to a colleague from the Yaoundé Office whose wife passed away in the days leading to the meeting. He also renewed his sympathy and solidarity with the colleagues in the aftermath of the attacks on the UN building in Abuja.

Mr Land-Kazlauskas thanked Mr Bouopda and the entire Yaoundé SUC for organizing the meeting and managing to overcome the challenges faced with travel, Mr Mohammed Mwamadzingo and the SUC Secretariat at Headquarters for their inputs (especially Ms Annie Rice and Ms Julia Lee), and the Yaoundé Office Director and HRD for their presence. He further appreciated the Regional Director’s availability for such regional meetings, stating that this demonstrated management’s commitment and success for social dialogue.

In her remarks, Ms Mayenga, wished the meeting well. She mentioned that such meetings can capacitate the representatives in carrying out their mandates, and contribute to the improved functioning of the ILO.

In his address to the meeting, Mr Dan expressed his appreciation and pleasure to have participated in the competition for the position of Director-General. He emphasized the need to continue strengthening freedom of expression amongst staff to ensure efficiency in the functioning and delivery of ILO work. Furthermore, he highlighted the need to strengthen capacities in the region for mobilization of resources for technical cooperation, as this is the means with which to secure continuous employment opportunities within the ILO. He concluded by thanking everyone and expressed admiration for the Staff Union representatives for presenting themselves to be at the service of others.
III. Summary of the deliberations at the meeting

(a) Choice of venue for meetings

Due to the travel challenges involved in getting to Yaoundé (involving flight cancellations leading to long trips by road from Douala), many colleagues were not able to attend the first day of the meeting. This occurrence prompted a general discussion on the conditions under which Staff Union meetings are organized. It was mentioned that, among other considerations, the choice of meeting venues was motivated by a need to show solidarity and demonstrate some particular challenges faced by members in various duty stations. The difficulties experienced by Staff Union representatives in travelling to Yaoundé in a way strengthens the position of the Staff Union with respect to the ongoing process of negotiating travel conditions under the proposed travel policy changes by ILO administration. The Staff Union should remain vigilant and ensure that existing conditions and benefits outlined in rules and regulations are not degraded in the course of delivery of their work, under the impression of achieving savings.

(b) Functioning of local committees

The representation and participation of staff at duty stations outside is governed by the Staff Union Rules, and especially Article 24. However, many Staff Union representatives need further support and guiding frameworks on the actual functioning of local committees. To this end the Staff Union should endeavour to compile a guide that accommodates the divergent realities of different field offices, especially following the field restructuring. These guiding principles should be aimed at promoting transparency, participation and relevance of the Staff Union to the general membership.

(c) Safety and security in the field

One of the greatest areas of concern for Staff Union representatives in Africa is the safety and security of staff in the field. In fact, security and safety is a standard agenda item in all Staff Union meetings.

Whilst there has been a big improvement undertaken by SERVSEC, security measures remain highly insufficient, especially with regard to locally-recruited staff. In general, field staff continue to encounter safety challenges, more so in countries experiencing socio-political upheavals. The recent incidences and developments in Abuja, Yaoundé and Cairo dictate that the SUC needs to continue to call for the strengthening of security measures for all ILO staff members.
During the course of the deliberations on security, the meeting was informed that a colleague from the Yaoundé Office was attacked by robbers at his residence the night before. The incident brings to light the need to provide adequate safety and security for all ILO staff. In this respect, the African Regional Committee Meeting will continue to be held in countries where colleagues face particular challenges.

**Staff Health Insurance Fund (SHIF)**

The main concern raised about the Staff Health Insurance Fund (SHIF) was the continued postponement of discussions by management on the need to revamp it to make it more responsive to the needs of its contributing members. Staff from different offices face the same difficulties, which include excessive delays in processing of claims and its irrelevance in meeting needs of staff based in Africa. The meeting was informed that a new system to manage the reimbursement process is being developed and could become operational in July 2013. Representatives were of the view that the discussion should now focus on a complete overhaul of the SHIF, through decentralizing and restructuring, and allocating resources to improve its functioning. Mechanisms of acquiring alternative health insurance providers at the local level should also be considered.

The Staff Union should push for such changes immediately, as the SUC is now fully represented on the SHIF Management Committee.

**Reclassification, job grading, titularization and personal promotions**

The Staff Union Legal Adviser made various presentations, covering issues such as the reclassification of posts, the criteria applied, eligibility and appeal processes. It was noted that the issue of reclassification is part of the mediation process instituted following the Staff Union global action in 2010. In order to strengthen requests for reclassification, emphasis should be placed on the need for all submissions and applications to be presented in writing in line with Circular No. 639. It was suggested that the Staff Union needs to continue its follow-up on the proposals by management for a global assessment of jobs and classification with a view to ensuring that it does not result in negative outcomes for members.

With regard to the process of titularization and criteria used, participants were urged to share information and encourage members to play their role in completing the required documents as guided by the staff regulations (Art. 4.6(c) and Circular No. 452). Local SUC representatives were also encouraged to share information where they identified irregularities, especially as regards the determination of those qualifying for titularization.
On personal promotions, it was reiterated that all applications have to be submitted and reasoned in writing. It was highly recommended that Staff Union representatives should remain vigilant in preventing precarious contracts as they become difficult to account for and reverse in the future.

(f) Salary advances and Staff Development Funds

It was noted that some minimal progress had been realized on issues related to salary advances and Staff Development Funds. Numerous discussions took place between the Staff Union and the Treasury (FINANCE) resulting in a new IGDS on salary advances being issued.

And, following negotiations with management, Staff Development Funds have been decentralized and are now managed at the country office level. However, it was observed that efforts still need to be made to ensure that the Staff Union is involved in the determination of use of the funds at the country office level. The Staff Union should insist on having joint training committees at the local level to review staff training needs and availability of allocations and to agree on activities as identified by staff for their career development.

(g) Occupational Health and Safety (OSH)

Participants were informed by the General Secretary of the ILO Staff Union (Ms Annie Rice, via video conferencing) that a new policy on Occupational Health and Safety has been developed for ILO staff as a result of negotiations between management and the Staff Union. Training on health and safety promotion will be provided for Staff Union representatives with the cost of the training being covered by management. The meeting called for a resolution to be drafted concerning the immediate implementation of the new policy.

(h) Salary surveys

The meeting was concerned that challenges still remain as regards staff salaries and general living conditions as determined by the current salary survey methodology. Staff salaries continue to be below living standards in many duty stations. The Staff Union needs to continue to call on management to take steps to redress the anomalies despite management’s insistence that this matter is a UN common system issue. Yes, the ILO is a part of the system and should lead the UN in terms of improving the working conditions of staff in line with its mandate.
ILO travel policy

A copy of the working document on travel policy was shared at the meeting. In addition, the Chairperson of the Staff Union Committee gave an update on the draft policy currently being negotiated with management. The SUC has provided proposals and inputs in order to ensure that travel conditions are not degraded and that the new policy takes into consideration the realities in the field, especially within Africa. Staff health and security should not be compromised in any way in the process of carrying out their duties and assignments. There should be adequate consultation on the policy to ensure that all issues are addressed in a similar manner, as evidence is showing that there are different practices across offices and regions.

IV. Conclusions and recommendations

(a) Visibility of local Staff Union committees

The conclusions on the discussions on the local Staff Union activities emphasized the need to establish strong mechanisms for accountability and promote membership participation through regular contacts. More emphasis would need to be given to staff in countries where the ILO is a non-resident agency. Good practices could be adopted from the experiences of the ILO Office in Abuja in terms of membership mobilization and ensuring that all staff, including those in out-post project offices, realize benefits of being a Staff Union member.

It is important to ensure that the Staff Union Committee at Headquarters is fully informed of the situation at the local levels. This will enable the SUC in Geneva to represent members more effectively. In this regard, representatives need to share the following with the SUC secretariat: the monthly lists of members, financial statements and the use of funds at the local level. All local committees were urged to submit their financial statements for 2010-2011, as well as the current lists of members, to ensure close follow-up by the SUC on issues related to titularization, elections of titular members, etc.

(b) Functioning of SHIF

In light of the lack of progress being made with regard to urgent actions and modalities necessary for the restructuring of the SHIF to address staff requirements, the Staff Union Committee must give serious consideration to the restructuring and adequate resourcing of the SHIF. The SHIF must be made to discharge its role without
compromising benefits to staff. In the meantime, the SHIF must take all measures to ensure that the repayment of the invoices submitted by the staff does not exceed one month from the date of submission.

(c) Relations of local SUCs with FUNSAs

ILO country office management should collaborate with the Staff Union to ensure that fundamental principles and rights at work and principles of freedom of association are integrated in forging closer UN Country Team staff-management relations. ILO country office management must utilize established UNCT structures and forums to sensitize the UNCT on the fundamental principles and rights at work, including freedom of association. Where a staff union representative or member is intimidated or treated less favourably by UNCT members because of his/her union representative status and/or activities, the country office management shall undertake measures to guarantee the protection of the Staff Union members’ fundamental principles and rights at work.

(d) Mediation process

The SUC should prepare itself for action should the outcome of the negotiations be undesirable with the view to remaining focused and adopting a common position. The discussion also noted that the role of the Legal Adviser has now become more prominent, and his availability to service the SUC was confirmed. There is a need to ensure follow-up and review of progress made from decisions taken in previous SUC meetings to strengthen accountability of the Staff Union to its members.

(e) Reclassification and grading

The Staff Union representatives in Africa invite the Regional Management to take into consideration the concerns mentioned below and address them adequately:

i. When suppressing posts, if it means that there will be added responsibility for other officials it should be done in consultation with the concerned staff members in the presence of the Staff Union Committee to ensure that they are adequately rewarded;

ii. Since suppression of posts involve staff movements in some areas and restructuring actions in other areas, management must avoid the deterioration of working conditions (increase and diversification of tasks) which may result in the burn-out of staff;

iii. There should be no downgrading of posts given the fact that the demands facing the organization are much higher than in the past;
iv. Furthermore, ILO staff in Africa continuously request the upgrading of posts in order that grades correspond with roles and responsibilities related to these positions and qualifications. The Staff Union requires management to review the job vis-à-vis posts in Africa as a matter of urgency.

v. HRD should undertake a comprehensive review of relevant texts to update and make them implementable towards effecting mobility of staff, including nationally-recruited officials.

vi. Management should immediately review job descriptions and conduct a comprehensive review of the tasks assigned to each position at the regional and national level compared to other UN agencies. Classification of grades should also change in line with the UN System.

(f) Safety and security of staff

The African Regional Staff Union Committee invites the Director of the Regional Office for Africa to integrate the concerns outlined below:

i. Security in Africa, which is an important issue that needs more attention. Fast and firm actions should be taken towards managing day-to-day incidents.

ii. Clear guidelines on use of the various modes of travel, especially airlines and suitable back-up plans.

iii. SERVSEC to follow up and make regular visits to the field to check the security status of all staff. Regional management must ensure that there is an adequate and safe working space for all staff in the field.

iv. Innovative re-design of available office space to integrate security measures.

(g) Travel policy

The African Regional Staff Union Committee supports the Staff Union Committee at Headquarters in its tireless negotiations on conditions of travel. The difficulties inherent in air travel in the region, particularly in Central and West Africa, should be taken into account. These concerns include uncertainty in the supply of air transport in line with safety requirements, involving long, painful journeys which affect the health of employees, and the fact that airports are sometimes very far from the duty station. The current threshold of five hours to use business class should be maintained taking into account the total travelling time.
(h) Occupational safety and health

The SUC is to continue to push for the implementation of the OSH policy to ensure safe and healthy working conditions for staff.

(i) Staff Development Funds

The Regional Office should embark on the training of management on the principles of social dialogue and collective bargaining in country offices and Decent Work Support Teams. This is important, as it has been noted that many directors do not involve their staff in decision-making processes, even on issues dealing with staff training and their career development.

Yaoundé, 4 July 2012

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