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**Statement by the Staff Council**

**Statement by the ITU Staff Council**

**ITU Council Working Group FHR**

**25 January 2021**

Madam Chairman,

Mr Secretary-General,

Mr Deputy Secretary-General

Directors of the three Bureaux

Councillors,

Dear colleagues,

It is my honour to address you today on behalf of the ITU Staff Council.

First, I would like to wish all of you and your families a very healthy and happy 2021. The new year does not feel much different from the previous one just yet, but we are hopeful that it will bring solace, resilience, and recovery to all of us and around the world.

Throughout the year ahead of us and during the ongoing pandemic, there are some important milestones that we think will stand out, both in terms of administrative and institutional objectives:

* A Return to Office under safe and secure conditions;
* Adapting to our “new normal” operational procedures as we prepare for successful ITU key conferences and events such as:
* The continuation of the World Telecommunication Standardization Assembly,
* The Road to Addis and the World Telecommunication Development Conference,
* The World Summit on the Information Society Forum 2021
* ITU Telecom World 2021
* And ongoing preparations for the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference 2022 and
* the World Radiocommunication Conference 2023.

2021 will be a pivotal year in defining the future direction of the Union. Your decisions, your commitment, and your priorities will lay down the path to reaching the international targets set in the Connect 2030 Agenda with a reinforcing effect on the timely achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The unprecedented challenges brought about by COVID-19 have shown that ITU’s role and mandate are even more critical in expanding meaningful connectivity to enable people to continue working and communicating, despite the pandemic. ITU’s work matters more than ever and to more people than ever, and we are standing up to expectations.

To succeed in connecting the world better than before, the Union must be well- equipped in terms of staff, tools and facilities in order to be able to adapt to the ongoing disruption while delivering the services that you - our membership - need to overcome the challenges of the pandemic and build back better with stronger, more resilient digital economies and societies.

We are here to listen to you, support you and serve you. We stand ready to provide advice and guidance and accompany you in the lead up to and through the recovery.

Likewise, we need your support and a safe, enabling environment to carry out our mission. I am taking the floor to raise a few issues that are of great importance to ITU staff and that we need your support, so that we ensure the right conditions are in place for ITU to deliver the impact you – and we all – aspire for.

1. ***The global coronavirus pandemic spells a hugely uncertain future – and opportunities***

The number of COVID-19 infections and casualties continues to rise in different countries around the world, while the virus continues to develop and mutate with the introduction of new variants. The pandemic has put huge demands on every one of us as individuals, as parents, as citizens and as employees.

In many respects, business as usual is not an option in the new realities. We have all had to adjust our strategies, working methods and attitudes. Change has been constant. We have been reallocating resources, reconfiguring internal processes and rescoping our activities to keep on track with your goals and develop new initiatives to support you as best we can. We are confident that we have succeeded, and our efforts have helped contributed to your efforts to respond to urgent priorities.

Despite the adversity and sweeping change, ITU staff’s morale remains relatively intact. Staff dedication has intensified, and we are all learning as we go while striving to take timely, meaningful action to support you – our membership.

The ITU Staff Council recognizes the efforts deployed by the ITU Administration in mitigating the health crisis and supporting staff’s well-being through challenges of all kind. The business continuity and protection measures put in place have helped maintain staff productivity and the quality of our work and services. We are confident that the Administration will continue monitoring and evaluating the health situation and ITU staff well-being and expand the coverage of the ad-hoc measures. The ITU Staff Council remain available to support their choices and actions, and ensure that we maintain an efficient and productive working environment together.

1. ***Pre-COVID projects have become even more complex and require careful attention***

The ambitious new ITU HQ building project was a highly complex undertaking even before the global pandemic hit. With the current outlook, many project assumptions made at the outset have become uncertain. Extra caution is required in studying and validating every stage of the project, so modern health and safety conditions for staff and delegates are built in the design of the building. ITU staff expects nothing less than the highest standards for such measures to be applied to this landmark project and our firm belief is that the ITU Administration will ensure that this be the case.

With this regard, we would very much like to highlight a few points:

* The work of all sectors, the General Secretariat and the various services has been restructured in response to COVID-19 on the top of internal restructuring and transformation, including the implementation of teleworking and virtual events. This re-shuffling and the new working methods will affect the “new normal” for our future working environment and the physical facilities component attached to it. The new parameters of that environment will need to be carefully redefined and consulted with staff representatives to ensure the needs of staff and the requirements of service are adequately met.

We expect that the new physical working environment in ITU HQ will set the tone for a new corporate and leadership culture in ITU. The future working conditions and culture will determine the work outcomes delivered to you, our members.

* While understanding the need to secure viable financial fallback scenarios for the new HQ building, the ITU Staff Council is very concerned to hear of mentions of proposed or potential uses of the ASHI Health Insurance Fund to reinforce the Risk Registry Fund for the new building. Hospitals, clinics and health insurance funds are under huge strain during this global pandemic. In these uncertain times, we call upon the ITU Administration to remain vigilant and cautious and recognise that any potential operational savings should be kept in reserve to safeguard and ensure ITU’s ongoing operations, given the current health and economic crisis.
* Last but not least, the creation of a statutory committee on Health, Safety and Security in accordance with the HR Strategic Plan is a long overdue and a first step to creating effective channels for discussion of the issues related to the health crisis and to staff working conditions in both the old and new HQ buildings as well in all ITU regional and area offices.

Given the importance of the new building project to all staff and the changing requirements for a healthy, enabling working environment, we thank and encourage the ITU Administration to continue holding periodic information sessions with staff on the new building, on COVID-19 mitigation measures and on the overarching staff working conditions strategy.

1. ***Strengthening of the ITU accountability framework also means fair rewards for high performance***

The ITU Staff Council welcomes the ongoing efforts towards strengthening the ITU accountability framework and expects that it will bring much needed clarity, transparency and due process in the implementation of ITU’s operational plans towards the achievement of ITU’s strategic objectives.

The ITU Staff Council to reaffirm the importance of the consistent application of the following principles:

* First, sanctions, when required, need to be clearly defined, proportionate and implemented consistently at alllevels.
* Second, sanctions for poor performance and accountability requirements need to be balanced with meaningful rewards and mechanisms for due recognition of high performance. What’s more, outstanding performance ought to lead to a rewarding carrier path to enable the Union to retain talent and achieve a range of organizational benefits. We therefore propose the introduction of a new promotion policy in line with the HR Strategic Plan and in lieu of the pre-existing one abrogated in 2005. New opportunities for carrier growth will boost staff motivation and create a virtuous circle of high performance, better productivity and quality of work, along with a reduction in turnover.
* Third, we believe on-the-job and specialized training needs to be expanded to reskill our workforce. Tailored learning plans help motivate staff and allow them to evolve their full potential, while ensuring the skills of all staff are adequate to carry the evolving mandate of the Union. A higher overall level of staff competence will also help minimize the risk of laying off staff in these particularly uncertain times.

We believe ITU membership views ITU staff as our most valuable business asset and we count on your support to balance the required aforementioned stronger sanctions in the new accountability framework with positive incentives and new growth opportunities for staff.

Dear Council members

We would like to conclude our remarks today by extending a heartfelt thanks to all of you and witnessing our deep appreciation for your support to ITU. Your encouragement, dedication and active participation in all the various fora and initiatives of the Union show that our work matters to you all, despite the odds.

Only by working together we will stand the best possible chance of fulfilling achieving our common goals.

We invite you to consider the proposals made by the ITU Staff Council, so that we can advance together in ITU’s new decade of action towards the ambitious goals of meaningful connectivity, supporting sustainable development and building a better digital future.

Finally, let me assure you that ITU staff is fully committed to pursuing the goals and fulfilling the mandate of the Union throughout the aftermath of the global pandemic and we will devote all our competence, efforts and energy to advance your priorities and to promote connectivity, sustainability and digital development everywhere and for all.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Stay healthy, stay safe.

Maximillian Jacobson – Gonzalez

President, ITU Staff Council