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**Statement by the President of the ITU Staff Council**

**ITU Council Working Group FHR**

**11 January 2022**

Madam Chair,

Mr Secretary-General,

Bureaux Directors,

Councillors and delegates,

Dear colleagues,

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

As we embrace this new year with renewed hope in light of the challenges that we have faced over the past two years, I would like to wish you and your families a very healthy and prosperous 2022. Let it pave the way to renewed resilience, determination, and recovery for all people around the world.

***ITU has risen above the hardship of the global crisis triggered by the pandemic, and ITU’s mission has come firmly in the spotlight of governments, industry, and the UN family alike.***

The pandemic has certainly made ITU’s work more relevant, more visible, and more impactful. The three Bureaus of ITU and the General Secretariat, rapidly adjusted to support our Membership through the digital transformation, through the pandemic and through recovery. Our common accomplishments have raised expectations regarding our upcoming initiatives and meeting the challenges ahead of us in an ever-changing environment.

***We’ve taken up the challenge, but we’ve also faced tough challenges along the way.***

The ITU Staff Council recognizes the continued efforts by the ITU Administration to mitigate the health crisis and support ITU staff’s well-being throughout the pandemic. The business continuity and COVID-19 protection measures put in place proved efficient and were welcomed and appreciated by staff. We are confident that the Administration will continue to actively support ITU staff’s well-being and enable a safe, flexible, and balanced working environment to uphold staff productivity and morale and the quality of our work and services in the “new normal”. The ITU Staff Council has been consistently working alongside the ITU Administration, ensuring that – together – staff find an equitable work-life balance in the virtual and hybrid working environments while maintaining the high value staff deliver to ITU Membership.

2022 is likely to bring its own set of challenges. With three major conferences planned and many unknowns, we need to be prepared for all scenarios.

We trust that in the first quarter of 2022, ITU leadership will craft a sound, ambitious but realistic, plan for the coming months considering the needs of staff and all stakeholders – and will follow through**.**

The coordination between Bureaus, with sister UN organizations and the ITU Membership will be of crucial importance in this memorable and unprecedented journey. ITU staff will spare no effort to continue to uphold the values and support the goals and achievements of the organization, to deliver quality service to you our member countries, to all ITU constituencies, and for global digital development. We, equally, humbly expect your renewed support and an adequate duty of care from ITU management, for ITU staff in general and every individual staff member, in these exceptional circumstances.

From our discussions with ITU staff we presently see **three main areas of action that need attention from the ITU Administration – in consultation with staff through the ITU Staff Council – and of course with your support.**

Progress in these three main areas will result in increased productivity gains, enhance staff

commitment and motivation and heighten the standing of the Union as a modern, fit-for-purpose, resilient UN agency.

**1.The need to further strengthen internal policies, regulations, and legal frameworks – today.**

Sound policies and legal frameworks – are vital for building our institutional resilience and for improving our collective capacity for action in the development of **a comprehensive ITU-wide organizational governance and compliance framework** as a pre-requisite for fully digital work processes and enabling the implementation of adequate technical solutions to support the consistent implementation of internal policies and procedures, as recommended in the external forensic report.

Since data protection and **data privacy have become a priority in digital operations across the board**, those new frameworks will require new internal policies, procedures, and systems to ensure that personal information is captured, stored, and processed in ways that are secure. Namely, internal policies on data protection and data management will be essential to take internal processes to the next level and ensure the thorough, consistent implementation of the executive recommendations to the ITU Secretary General. We strongly believe such internal policies need to be developed as a matter of priority and in close consultation with the ITU Staff Council.

* We welcome the pilot introduction of **the new ITU Accountability Framework** and anticipate seeing the integration of existing initiatives under one meaningful framework, thereby raising awareness of the importance of accountability in all ITU activities. We will follow closely and support the implementation and the growth in ownership of the Accountability framework which the ITU Staff Council upholds and believes is a shared responsibility of all staff and ITU management.
* We would also like to reiterate the importance of monitoring and evaluating all the various internal policies, and the legal frameworks defined by Council. We welcome the regular reporting on the implementation of the HR Strategic Plan 2020-2023 and would like to emphasize the need for enhanced result-based reporting on the Plan’s objectives through SMART indicators, and more specific information on the achievement of its milestones, to ensure the transparency of implementation and fairly assess its advancement – making sure ITU is on track to accomplish the important improvements at hand.

**2. The second action point is the need to continue building a more open, safe, and resilient culture where innovation, thought leadership and cross-fertilization, thrive.**

As we believe that a stronger emphasis and coordinated efforts are needed to evolve the ITU culture and the high-level principles to which ITU leadership is committed. A safe speak-up culture will go a long way towards ensuring the meaningful implementation of the new ITU Accountability Framework, internal policies and building institutional integrity. It will enable ITU to transition towards a more open leadership culture conducive to new ideas, experimentation, synergies, and outcome-based collaboration across our Bureaus, and all levels and areas of expertise.

**Such culture will enable the transformation of ITU from a workplace to a community** – a place where people bond around shared values, feel valued as professionals and individuals, acquire ownership and recognition for their achievements, and have a voice in decisions that affect them[[1]](#footnote-2).

Without such a shift in culture and change in mindsets, ITU might find itself unequipped to power up its transformation to a fit-for-purpose organization and grow its excellence going forward with integrity and a strong sense of purpose – shared by all staff and with ITU leadership. A more open and safe institutional culture will also boost staff commitment and morale, and create more cohesive, engaged teams ready to fast-track the achievement of ITU Strategic objectives with competence and confidence.

This is what ITU Staff aspires to, is ready to contribute to, and fully trusts your direction for.

**3. The third area that we see the need for action is the requirement to prepare now for the future.** As a number of current projects and initiatives are defining the future of work at ITU – and adequate decisions are required as a matter of urgency to set the right direction for the Union in the coming decade.

Councillors and delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

***2022 is going to be an unprecedented year for ITU, in many respects.***

We are in the midst of global uncertainty, slowing economic activity and urgent imperatives for humanity in this decade of action. ITU staff has accommodatingly adapted to the new realities and priorities, and the adjustment of working patterns. But we aren’t done.

The **New normal** is having a lasting impact and has changed the ways of working, how we interact with you, ITU Members, and new ways doing business have emerged and keep evolving. ITU staff has been agile and inventive to find the best recipe for teleworking and hybrid working, whenever and wherever we might be - our kitchen tables, our living rooms or even our terraces or backyards in sunny weather – without prejudice to our outcomes, availability and level of support to you, ITU Membership, and often – with heavier workloads than ever. The flexible arrangements introduced by ITU management have been beneficial to staff productivity and well-being, and we encourage the ITU Administration to continue to implement the most optimal working arrangements as local and global circumstances evolve.   
  
We understand that there might be a need for internal reshuffling of departments and teams in view of better accommodating the new business requirements in these extraordinary circumstances and preparing for the future. We nevertheless trust that all staff moves or requirements for additional duties will be planned and executed in the best possible conditions for staff, with staff’s input and providing adequate compensation measures whenever possible. The ITU Staff Council remains available to support the efforts of the Administration in this regard and uphold the needs of the organization and of all ITU staff.

* + We commend the efforts of the ITU Administration to chart the way forward to **the future of work at ITU** through **the transformation of ITU** as part of the wider UN reform, the review of the ITU regional presence and as a future-proof specialized agency.

We aspire that 2022 will be a year of laying the groundwork for an organization-wide transformation initiatives that will sharpen the focus of our collective action and chart purposeful paths through the transformation, for the Union, the ITU Membership and for all staff.

We look forward to the outcome of important initiatives under way, such as the skill gap analysis and the subsequent revamping of the ITU Competency framework as well as the new Performance Management Framework and are eager to support the Administration’s efforts in developing those foundational pieces and ensuring staff understands the shift to new patterns and is ready and able to support it. We count on the ITU Administration to meaningfully involve all ITU staff and the ITU Staff Council, especially, in the discussions on the new frameworks and initiatives, and clearly, pro-actively and regularly communicate on the modalities of the planned enhancements to internal policies and rules.

In terms of continuing learning and development, we believe it is necessary to redouble efforts to upgrade and further refresh the training opportunities available to staff in key areas such as new technical skills, leadership and change management. Likewise, we encourage the ITU Administration to explore new ways of supporting staff development and retention of talent, by providing tailored training offers and diverse career development opportunities. We also believe that attracting more diverse talent to ITU is key to building a more resilient, effective, and future-ready workforce.

* + Going forward, **the New ITU building project** is a central piece in shaping the new patterns of work in ITU – flexible, hybrid, with greater reliance on digital technologies and requiring broader internal and external collaboration. Widening our options and defining those patterns for the workforce of the Union over the next decade, is crucial to prepare for the many changes ahead of us.

We will therefore need comprehensive, well thought-through policies on working from home, hybrid working and the management of physical office space. Such policies and their consistent implementation will ensure optimal working conditions in the transition period, a period of several years, and beyond. Along with the requirements of our mission, we need to address how best to support in-office staff, remote workers and hybrid employees at Headquarters as well as regional and area offices.   
  
Staff expectations are to receive relevant, specific information about the planned scenarios, as often as possible and feel that they are being considered, included, and consulted. The ITU Staff Council is therefore always available to be involved at all stages, in the discussion of concrete options and to be part of the decisions taken. ITU’s new Headquarters building needs to be designed and furnished to meet the functional requirements of the work of ITU staff. ITU staff are hoping for a new physical working environment that both matches their needs and enables them to serve you better.

Mindful of budgetary constraints for many ITU Members, ITU Staff have also expressed concerns on the financial side of the new ITU building project and believe that the discussions on workforce enablement need to go beyond the expected benefits and gains, and address the risks, the unbudgeted costs and contingency thoroughly and transparently. Such information needs to be consistently made widely available, in a timely manner, to all ITU staff.

Dear Councillors and delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude my remarks today by extending a heartfelt thanks to all of you and reiterating our deep appreciation for your support to ITU’s mission and to ITU Staff. Your commitment and relentless contribution to all the various initiatives of the Union have been a source of inspiration and drive for our thinking and our actions.

The ITU Staff Council invite you to support our proposals, so that we can advance together in ITU’s journey towards the urgent goals of sustainable digital development, people-centred digital transformation, and global, equitable recovery.

On a last note, let me reemphasize that ITU staff is committed more than ever to pursuing the goals and fulfilling the mandate of the Union through global uncertainty, through old and new challenges, and we will devote all our competence, energy, and integrity to advance your priorities and align our collective actions with our values.

United we have been before and through the pandemic, united we shall remain through the recovery and actively preparing for the future.

Stay safe, stay healthy, keep up our shared ambition and we hope to meet with all of you in person very soon.

Thank you very much for your attention.

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1. Borrowed and rephrased from Adam Grant [↑](#footnote-ref-2)