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| **13 July 2023** |
| **English only** |
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| Statement by the President of the ITU Staff Council |
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Mr Chairman,

Mrs Secretary-General,

Mr Deputy Secretary-General,

Directors of the three Bureaux,

Distinguished Councillors,

Dear colleagues,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address this esteemed audience as the President of the ITU Staff Council. It is also a great honour to have this opportunity to share our thoughts and concerns regarding the present challenges facing the Union and to emphasize on the role of ITU staff in making ITU stronger and fit for the future.

ITU Council is a strong testament to the pursuit of organizational excellence and the power of collaboration. As I look around this room, I am humbled by the wealth of knowledge, deep-rooted experience, and the valuable contributions of each one of you bring here. Your commitment, energy, and efforts devoted to the Union's cause guide our mission.

In our rapidly changing world, disruption and volatility have become the new normal for the organizations around the world – and ITU is no exception. We are deeply concerned about the financial challenges the Union is facing today. The uncertainty surrounding our future has a profound impact on all of us.

This year’s meeting of Council is different from the last. It is the first for the new ITU senior leadership team after last year's plenipotentiary elections, and it sets the stage for a new vision for ITU’s future. Multiple innovations and pivotal decisions are expected to be taken. Your decisions will have far-reaching consequences for the ITU and for the staff as a whole.

We understand that change and opportunities go hand in hand. As with any organisation, challenges need our collective action, strategic planning and most importantly, unity in our purpose.

I am here today to express the staff’s support to the decisions to be made by our esteemed Members this week and our commitment to collaborate.

The whole staff, including our colleagues from field offices stand ready to engage and assist in the transformation of our 158-year-old organization. We would like to defy the odds and help shape ITU’s future and continuing success.

I’m confident that ITU will emerge from these challenging times stronger, more agile and impactful, but this requires to take concerted actions in three core priorities.

Councillors, ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to share our reflections on these priorities starting with the first one:

**One - Transformation requires transparency and collaboration.**

On the agenda of both the Council plenary and this Committee on Administration and Management, important documents will define the short, medium and long-term future of ITU. Proposed changes to the structure and regulatory environment of our Union pose both exciting opportunities and daunting challenges.

From the transformation of our human resources policies to that of ITU’s financial management and organizational structure, proposals have been put forward to pave the way for significant change.

We should bear in mind that transformation fundamentally concerns people and has profound effects on people’s lives. As we embark on this journey of organizational transformation, it becomes imperative for the senior leadership to prioritize transparency, and collective thinking at every step of the process.

We understand the demands of transformation and we are willing to take active part in that process. We are conscious that time is tight, and the ITU will require greater involvement of its Staff in the new plans and strategies, and we should also keep in mind the key role of ITU Staff in the success of this process and its smooth implementation. At the same time, we advocate that such changes should not compromise staff welfare, but should provide opportunities for skill enhancement, personal growth, and career advancement to our Staff members as we would like also to see this as an opportunity to implement career planning in ITU.

As we navigate transformation in ITU, we expect the ITU leadership to adhere to the core principles of transparency, good faith, fairness, and equal treatment for all while making decisions and implementing them. Because ultimately, by doing so we can build a resilient and adaptable workforce ready to weather any storm.

ITU Staff Council remains optimistic and committed to collaborate with the ITU leadership team to prepare and work through the transformation process and on all major issues, and to navigate diligently towards a more efficient and future oriented ITU.

**Two – Pressure is growing on ITU staff**.

Secondly, we would like to address the mounting pressure on the ITU staff.

Against a backdrop of financial and organizational challenges, we’re now seeing – with concern – growing pressure on ITU staff to do more with less, resulting in much higher workloads and extended working hours in a more complex environment. The further reduction in staff numbers adds further complexity. I would like to underline that the expectation for the ITU to deliver much more with much less is not a sustainable trajectory.

As we strive to accomplish our organizational objectives, we should continue to prioritize staff welfare and work-life balance, by also taking into account of the challenges in the field offices.

It is, therefore, our collective responsibility to prioritize and improve working conditions, recognizing that the well-being and performance of staff are integral to the realization of ITU’s strategic goals. We also need to explore and implement strategies that reinforce decision-making, delegate authority, and set clear operational priorities. By this way, we can promote efficiency and collaboration, improve processes, and objectively review existing tasks.

As the ITU Staff Council, we stand united in urging our organization to prioritize work-life balance and provide us with the necessary tools, resources, and good working conditions to deliver on ITU’s mandate and excel in our delivery.

**Three – New building: to be or not to be?**

Thirdly, let's address a monumental decision we face today: the construction of a new building for ITU headquarters in Geneva.

As ITU evolves, we should invest in strategic areas of the secretariat for our future. We should be allocating both our capital and talent to areas of future growth and of growing importance to our member states.

With digital transformation sweeping economies and societies, and only seven years left for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals – the world is faced with critical development imperatives and competing priorities. Is a new building for ITU headquarters in Geneva a development imperative or a top priority for ITU Members? The onus of decision is on all of you here, as a group.

Investing in real estate in the coming years when decisive ITU action is expected in the world, would mean divesting in other areas, such as upgrading ITU’s assistance portfolio for our Members, or putting more resources for staff development. Importantly, as the financial viability of the new building project hangs in the balance, staff is concerned that the organizational priorities may shift away from our strategic objectives and dilute our focus and undermine our capacity to deliver impact.

The transition to the new building and the new office space concept are also likely to have negative impact on staff working conditions, in addition to the disruption of Geneva-based meetings and activities with ITU Members. We are concerned that organizational productivity may suffer a great deal, in the interim period. From increased staff density to noise and dust pollution to the lack of adequate internal policies, we should carefully consider if we are well-equipped for this transition. Even if you choose not to proceed with the new building project, it's crucial to understand that significant renovations of our existing buildings and facilities will still require considerable financial investment and cause disruptions.

Going ahead – or not –the new building project is going to be a hard choice, with significant effects on ITU’s overall financial sustainability, and on the Union’s role in advancing digital transformation globally.

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Councillors, ladies, and gentlemen,

I would like to once again thank for this opportunity so that ITU Staff Council could contribute to your discussions. We have shared our thoughts and concerns with utmost conviction. It is our genuine hope that our voice will be heard and that ITU staff will have a rightful place in shaping the future of the Union, together with you. I hope our words resonate with you.

I also wish to take the opportunity to thank all ITU staff for their dedication and resilience in serving our Membership. Rest assured that the ITU Staff remains true to the mandate of the Union and stands ready to serve with unwavering dedication, technical proficiency, and utmost professionalism.

I wish you fruitful discussions and a successful meeting.

Thank you very much.

*Delivered on 13 July 2023, during the ordinary session of ITU Council-23, by*

*Mr Onder Cetinkaya*

*President of the ITU Staff Council*