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| **22 March 2022** |
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**STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE ITU STAFF COUNCIL**

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

**ITU Council**

**Tuesday 22 March 2022**

Madam Chair,

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 well as on behalf of all ITU staff, in this first physical meeting of the ITU Council since 2019.

As we emerge from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, we acknowledge that this global crisis has impacted and changed our lives in many ways and that current conflicts and future crises will also doubtless leave their mark.

The crisis has exposed the vital role of ICTs in our global society. As you all know, ICTs have been instrumental over the last 2 years in keeping us connected and in providing business continuity solutions for the many challenges that we have been confronted with.

From education to health, from remote work in virtually all areas to being connected to our families, colleagues and friends, we have all benefited from the transformational power of digital solutions, and the world has recognized this by putting digital transformation at the forefront of the post-covid recovery strategies.

During this period, ITU staff has continued to embody the values of the United Nations, and of ITU, by constantly adapting to the circumstances to ensure that ITU continued to deliver the services that you, our Membership requires, to meet your needs and fulfil the Union's mandate. As we gradually move to a new phase of the pandemic we wanted to start with recognizing the strong commitment and professionalism of our colleagues, even when confronted with the challenges to rapidly adjust to a new work-life balance. We also take this opportunity to thank the ITU management for their rapid response and dedicated support to ensure staff safety and wellbeing so that we could deliver services at an even greater level of efficiency despite the odds. We could not have achieved all this without the continued support and collaboration of you, our members.

I believe we all recognize that this year is a pivotal year for ITU. The UN's Decade of Action has perhaps started for many staff as a Decade of Anxiety. We must confront these anxieties with very positive work ethics and strategies, building on our solid foundation to advance our purpose to deliver cutting edge ICT services to our Member States and Members.

As we get together in this last session of the Council before the 2022 ITU Plenipotentiary Conference we wanted to share with you some of the lessons learned by ITU staff over the last 24 months, as well as to invite you to take into account what we consider critical elements that the Conference should address to ensure that ITU continues delivering on its mission over the next four-year cycle.

From our discussions with ITU staff we presently see three priorities that need urgent attention from the ITU Administration.

1. **ITU’s need to set up modern HR policies to maximize efficiency and agility to adapt to digital transformation**

ITU is playing a key role in facilitating digital transformation in all regions across the globe. As this transformation advances, we are finding the need to also transform, modernize and adapt ITU as an organization, with a particular emphasis on updating ITU’s internal policies and working methods.

The last 24 months have shown us that staff can perform equally or even better with the introduction of more flexible working arrangements, with the introduction of a more extensive use of teleworking and with the use of collaborative tools. As we move forward with the preparatory process for the new building, we would like to invite the Council to endorse these positive experiences -which have allowed us to be “always on” for our membership- and instruct the ITU administration to adapt ITU internal policies to international best practices.

We urgently need a modern and updated performance management framework, data protection policy and flexible working policy. These policies will help make ITU – and ITU staff – to be more effective and more accountable as well as take into consideration the overall well-being equipped with all the modern tools that are needed to deliver high quality services.

**2. Defining an enabling Financial Plan to provide ITU with the framework to adjust to the challenges ahead.**

The ITU Staff Council has been following with concern the discussions held in the CWG-FHR on the different drafts of the Financial Plan for the 2024-2027 period. As the world moves into a new economic recession and global political instability, we are aware that the next years will be challenging for many from a financial point of view.

We are under no illusions about the financial challenges that lie ahead of us, as we seek to deliver a fit-for-purpose ITU, responsive to the needs of its Members. However, this would require maintaining the current level of funding of the Union, as well as the introduction of more modern information tools to monitor more closely the use of ITU’s financial resources.

We would like to make an appeal to all ITU members to consider your contributions to ITU not as an expense, but an investment. An investment to ensure the operation of the global telecommunication system, a system that has proved its critical value in one of the most challenging periods lived over the last few decades.

We would also like to extend an invitation to ITU membership to establish a financial plan that provides adequate resources to strengthen the capacity of ITU staff, and to continue promoting capacity development of ITU staff. In this context, we would like to propose the inclusion of a provision in the budget to allocate 10% of the eventual savings made in the annual budget to further support the implementation of the ITU HR strategic plan, in particular in the area of staff development.

To achieve this we need not only adequate, but efficient and effective expenditure choices financial monitoring and accountability, in consultation with the ITU Staff Council and staff.

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

1. **Our third common priority is the New ITU building project.**

Let us be under no illusions here - Geneva is a hub for real estate, and many UN agencies and Geneva institutions have embarked on real estate ventures through choice or obligation – to keep up with modern building requirements.

We need a new building, but it would be unrealistic to say that this project, as with all building projects, free from risk and perhaps even more so as a result of the uncertainties surrounding the pandemic, and the current increase of costs due to inflation and political turmoil. We all need to work together closely to monitor each phase of the project and continue to include ITU staff and the Staff Council in the process to ensure that we all get the building we want, that is right for ITU's needs and the needs of ITU Members as the goal is to equip ITU with the necessary facilities to carry our evolving mandate in the next decades.

Above all, the new building will be a working environment for staff, a venue for hosting delegates and a meeting place to bring together a wide variety of stakeholders, including during the construction period.

As we move forward with the approval of the relocation plan for the new building, and the start of the construction process, we encourage more focus on the transitional arrangements for staff. It is vital that adequate arrangements be put in place for the next five years to ensure that the working environment in ITU headquarters is conducive to the effective delivery of our mission Careful planning and new ways of organizing space and work activities will be paramount for keeping up productivity levels and staff morale. Put concretely, overcrowded offices should be avoided, ICT platforms should be wisely used to compensate for the limited space for meeting rooms and ensure quiet environments and dedicated spaces, taking into consideration noise, pollution and other construction related acoustic issues.

As Council reviews the current plans, we would like to reiterate the appeal we made in 2019: asking that the functionality and wellbeing of staff should remain a priority in this process. We make an appeal to review the current plans and guide the ITU administration in the process of finalizing the planning phase to deliver a solid project that doesn’t put staff at risk.

Let’s work together and ensure that the new building and the journey to get to the new building becomes an enabler of productivity, creativity ingenuity, commitment, passion, and drive of a strong ITU that leads in the industry.

Councillors and delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

ITU staff stand ready to do our part and of course hope and expect the same from ITU management and our HR department.

We commend the efforts of the ITU Administration to chart the way forward through uncertainties and transformation across the board. We expect and look forward to working with ITU management to improving our policies and working conditions. This is not only in the interests of all staff, but importantly, in the interests of management and ultimately, our Members and our very future.

Thank you very much for your attention.

*Delivered by Maximillian Jacobson – Gonzalez*

*President, ITU Staff Council*

*ITU HQ, Geneva*

*22 March 2022*