



12 November 2021

Mr President,  
Mr Representative of the Director-General,  
Excellencies, distinguished delegates,

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to address the General Conference for the first time as President of the International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU).

On the occasion of the 75th anniversary of our Organization, I convey to you, on behalf of our association, a message of hope and measured optimism.

I take this opportunity to sincerely congratulate the Director-General of UNESCO on her re-election to the head of our Organization. We are grateful to her for her efforts to ensure the return of universality within the Organization. We wish her every success in shouldering the weighty responsibility of leading our staff and assure her of our cooperation in the pursuit of an efficacy that is ethical for all.

Seventy-five is an age of wisdom, reflection and a time to hand over to future generations a UNESCO that is transparent, inclusive, diverse, modern and just.

The time has come to talk openly, raising every issue concerning UNESCO's future, including the place of the women and men that work here – the tremendous wealth of human capital that is crucial to achieving our Organization's noble goals and executing the programmes decided by your 41st session.

The women and men working at UNESCO care deeply about our Organization and its goals. They adhere to the values and principles that it transmits across the world. In order to continue to attract new talent, however, and to respond to the efforts that they are ready to make in their noble mission, ISAU requests that the staff be given the means that they need to be able to work effectively. Only then will the excellence of the staff – and, ultimately, the efficacy of the Organization – be certain to materialize. UNESCO has no other resource than its human resources.

Our international staff association has already taken note of the vision, principles and content of the human resources strategy; in the course of its work with our Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM), as in its messages to the Executive Board, ISAU has expressed reservations about the means needed to support the implementation of that strategy. ISAU regrets to note that the results of such a tool – intended, in principle, to improve the working conditions and career prospects of staff members, alongside the functioning and results of the Organization – are difficult to discern.

Without wishing to go into the details of the comments that we have already submitted to the Executive Board, ISAU recalls that an effective human resources management strategy calls for:

the adequate financial resources needed to attract, motivate, enhance and retain qualified staff and to enable them to implement the programmes that you endorse;

a staff policy that offers career advancement opportunities where every man and woman has an equal chance to develop and enhance their skills, consequent on their performance results and in line with a rigorous, honest and transparent performance evaluation system.

ISAU, in view of the scale of the challenge, therefore requests that any shortcomings be clearly articulated to provide input for management's forthcoming preliminary proposals on jobs, staff and skills management; and we decry the fact that management continues to undervalue our repeated statements on the issues of geographic distribution and succession planning, despite those being key pillars of human resources management.

Our staff association collaborates willingly and to the best of its ability with management's human resources department; and we have often said and written that the current fragmentation of staff management across the various sectors has undermined that department's necessarily overarching vision and management. The staff associations are essential, recognized, cogs in the machinery for effective human resources management; it has to be said, however, that we have noticed lately a slow erosion of our means of expression. To take just two recent examples, I must say that at the last meeting of the joint commissions of the Executive Board, we were only offered two minutes speaking time, which, of course, we refused; and more recently, the key General Conference documents – on the human resources management strategy and the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules – were released after the session General Conference had started, leaving us very little time to study them and submit our comments. We naturally want to work together with management, but it must give us the means to be able to.

I wish to conclude by reiterating, on behalf of the staff, our commitment to the ideals of our Organization. ISAU has always worked towards – and will continue, with dedication and in close cooperation with the Director-General and her management team, to strive for – the achievement of the goals and programmes for which UNESCO is responsible, with the only tool at its disposal: its staff.

Thank you for your attention.