



17 May 2023

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

I thank you for the time you have kindly given me to speak as President of the International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU), especially at this important time when UNESCO is about to adopt a new human resources management strategy.

We have a collective obligation to improve the overall efficiency of the Organization and to rectify the structural dysfunctions that ISAU has often pointed out and that the Division of Internal Oversight Services (IOS) has noted in its evaluation of the previous human resources management strategy.

At the outset, it should be said that these problems often stem from a lack of commitment on the part of the Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM), a problem that, nevertheless, seems likely to persist in the new strategy. For example, in the document submitted to you, we find out that HRM makes its actions and their results conditional on the allocation of additional resources, the amount of which is not specified. In other words, they will do the minimum. The document also states that responsibility for the Strategy will rest with all stakeholders. In other words, no one will be responsible for it.

This lack of involvement by HRM was also pointed out by IOS in the fact that HRM has little or even no presence in many recruitment processes. It is precisely in the area of recruitment that we observe many serious problems and irregularities, such as the failure to advertise posts and the refusal to consider qualified internal candidates. It is also known that colleagues prefer not to challenge even weak decisions for fear of retaliation. UNESCO cannot be effective if HRM does not actively monitor the practices of the Sectors in this area, Sectors which we are surprised to see every day are indifferent to the principle of transparency.

All this points to a deleterious culture of arbitrariness and impunity, which is all the more irrational in that the injustices accepted and covered up by the Administration have a significant financial cost for the Organization, that is – rightly – regularly condemned by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Tribunal.

It should be recalled at this point that the Member States have demanded that the Administration promote a healthy and ethical working environment. Yet, too many colleagues continue to come to us with reports of sexual and moral harassment, as well as harsh and derogatory language from some managers. For fear of reprisals, they too prefer to remain silent. Thus, the picture painted by the Ethics Office in its annual report does not reflect the full reality.

The Ethics Office does call upon staff to speak up when ethics violations are found. ISAU agrees with this call. However, I must draw the Office's attention to the seriousness of its call, which amounts to asking staff members **to be courageous** when they choose to defend themselves or to engage in whistleblowing. The risks associated with reporting unethical practices remain significant. Colleagues are often subject to retaliation, which may take the form of simple administrative decisions, justified on the basis of the needs of the service, but which mainly serve supervisors who are reluctant to see the rule of law reign. Will the Ethics Office also show the courage to work independently for the integrity of our Organization?

We are also concerned that IOS identified wellbeing as the area where there has been the least progress in its evaluation of the previous human resources management strategy. The staff suffer from stress and lack of psychological security and recognition, which lead to the undermining of our colleagues' trust in a system that does not respect the principles it professes. We therefore support the measures taken to foster a more serene work environment and a culture of accountability, such as the introduction of 360-degree evaluation recently decided upon on a trial basis.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, we would like to emphasize our status of stakeholder, which the Member States have long conferred on us but which, we must admit, the Administration still finds difficult to recognize or even accept. We must reiterate our dismay at the actions of a part of the Administration to systematically reduce our role in decisions affecting the staff and impede our ability to represent our colleagues, and at attempts to limit or control our communication with Member States.

The Administration must accept the fact that we are neither its adversaries nor its subordinates. We, the staff associations, are the emanation of the staff whose necessity for the Organization has been recognized and established by the Member States. We ask that the will of the Member States be respected.

The Administration would be more rational if it valued a genuine dialogue with the associations, based on a concern for efficiency and justice and therefore in the interest of UNESCO. Without such a dialogue, which is the essence of ISAU's mandate, the very capacity of the Organization to fulfill the missions that the Member States entrust to the Secretariat will be called into question.

Thank you for your attention.