



9 November 2023

Mr Chairperson,
Mr representative of the Director-General,
Excellencies, delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you for giving the International Staff Association of UNESCO (ISAU) the time to present to this assembly not only our association's mandate, but also, on a deeper level, the values that underpin UNESCO - peace, solidarity and respect for human dignity.

It is therefore my duty to begin by expressing our dismay and incomprehension at the resurgence of the open and violent conflicts that have dominated the news worldwide over the past biennium.

As President of a staff association, I must first remind you all that over 90 United Nations employees have lost their lives in the past month. Never, since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, have there been so many violent deaths among United Nations agency staff caught up in conflict.

We would like to pay tribute to these colleagues who have made the ultimate sacrifice for the ideals we defend each and every day. Their courage and dedication are an example we are proud to honour.

At this grave time, nothing is more important than the sense of responsibility with which we must approach each and every one of our discussion points, for everything must contribute to ensuring that our Organization is best equipped to serve its mandate for peace and security, solidarity and dialogue.

Ladies and gentlemen, you can see that particular attention must be paid to UNESCO's proposed new Human Resources Strategy for 2023-2027. Clarity must be the primary quality of such a strategy in order for it to support and value staff, the Organization's main asset, without whom your resolutions would have no concrete effect.

ISAU has actively offered its contribution throughout the process that resulted in the proposed document. We did so, as always, with transparency and objectivity. Yet we must admit that the proposed strategy does not offer the clarity we had hoped for. Rather, we feel we should be talking about perplexity, as the signals and messages sent out by the Administration appear convoluted, and at times even contradictory.

On a number of issues, we fully agree with most of the principles set out by the Administration. However, we have to say that we find it difficult to see how very concrete problems can be resolved over the coming period - whether these problems concern the increasing number of people hired on precarious contracts for very long periods, the lack of transparency in recruitment and promotion, the stagnating percentage of equitable geographical distribution of staff, or the improvement of staff welfare.

Many of the problems highlighted are institutional. The Bureau of Human Resources Management (HRM) lacks independence and autonomy and often appears to be limited to a subsidiary role with regard to the sectors. This limits UNESCO's ability to work towards creating an environment conducive to staff efficiency and well-being. It is without a doubt time to evaluate the effects of the reform that placed HRM under the authority of an Assistant Director-General (ADG), in other words a peer of the sector ADGs that HRM is supposed to monitor, rather than under the direct authority of the Director-General.

What I wish to emphasize is that there is always time for constructive reform. This was illustrated very recently by the findings published following the review of our organizations' internal justice mechanisms by the Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations system (JIU). The JIU's recommendation to allow our colleagues to consult an external legal adviser is a measure that we have asked of the Administration, for example.

I point this out as a reminder that ISAU always works in the spirit of progress and constructive dialogue. We hope that this is sincerely recognized by the Administration and the sectors and that the interests of the Organization truly take precedence when it comes to managing the staff of an organization dedicated - I am choosing my words carefully - to world peace and the promotion of human rights.

Nothing will be more harmful, amidst mounting crises, than to internally skirt around the very principles that we urge the world to practise sincerely.

Thank you for your attention.