

***77<sup>th</sup> session of the FICSA Council***

***Statement by Ms. Catherine Pollard – HLCCM Chair***

Dear colleagues and partners, greetings to you all.

And thank you sincerely for inviting us once again to join this council meeting.

This is indeed a unique opportunity to reach, through the federation, about 40,000 colleagues around the world.

The purpose and the relevance of the UN System is as important as always. The populations we serve, the governments and civil societies we support and the partners with which we operate are counting on us.

We are all too aware that the last few years have been characterized by a multitude of adverse events. The long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic still continues, and the number and magnitude of the crises in the world are increasing year after year.

This does not only put at risk decades of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals. It also puts a strain on the UN system workforce from multiple angles. The workload is continuously increasing while being faced with a rising number of budgetary restrictions. And increasingly, staff members are suffering from deteriorating security conditions in conflict areas and in several instances risking their life and health.

These are unprecedented challenges, but despite these difficulties, the UN system continues to fulfill its mission. So, I wish to wholeheartedly thank all our personnel that carry on with enormous strength and resilience under these uniquely difficult circumstances.

We are jointly addressing those challenges in many ways. First and foremost, by redefining our ways of interacting and working with each other and introducing new approaches, simpler and more effective processes, as was piloted during the Covid pandemic. And this is an ongoing, continuous process across the organizations. We welcome all those who come forward with innovative ideas to improve our ways of working.

The challenges of the current environment also continue to serve as a catalyst for our organizations to have more meaningful conversations about staff wellbeing, mental

health and the importance of workplace culture, as began during the pandemic. Many lessons have been identified, good practices shared, and the amount of counselling resources available to staff is increasing. HLCM recently agreed to increase joint funding for the support structure of the Mental Health Strategy Implementation Board, in which FICSA played a particularly active and constructive role, and for which we are grateful.

At the HLCM level, our joint efforts to address workforce and workplace issues are continuing and progressing. Building on the earlier work of the Task Force on the Future of the UN Workforce, we are undertaking efforts to reshape our workplace organization and culture for the better.

Increased efforts to foster Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the workplace are on their way through a dedicated multidisciplinary Working Group hosted by the HR Network, with the aim of achieving truly respectful and inclusive work environments. Disability inclusion is a priority in this area.

The fight continues against sexual harassment and sexual exploitation and abuse, and we are also looking at ways to better address the other forms of toxic behaviour and harassment that our personnel face around the world, including racism, sexism and gender discrimination.

Improving workplace culture is not just about fighting negative behaviours. It is also about promoting positive ones, sharing good practices, and being more intentional and clearer in our communication to our teams and to Member States on the interdependencies between results and resources. It's also about improving our leadership, and we continue to place emphasis on critical topics such as Occupational Safety and Health. None of these challenges can be resolved quickly. It's a journey, but HLCM has embarked on the path in good collaboration with the Staff Federations.

As we all know, HR matters are not only addressed by the organizations themselves, but also through ICSC's tripartite mechanism. One of the pillars on which our culture of impartiality, professionalism and ethical behavior is based are our Standards of Conduct. ICSC is currently revising those standards, and this is an important undertaking to re-calibrate expected behaviors at the workplace and in the public sphere, to ensure impartiality and neutrality as International Civil Servants.

Last year we were pleased with the endorsement of a new Parental Leave Framework by the ICSC, which represents a significant step towards acknowledging diversity and embracing modernization as an employer. Your FICSA representatives have made

critical contributions to this success, and this confirms that close collaboration and partnership on such matters are for the benefit of all. I say this particularly in light of the upcoming ICSC Comprehensive Compensation Review, which needs to strike a balance between financial sustainability and the preservation of our attractiveness as an employer of choice. Eroding conditions of service in an environment that is already characterized by limited resources or – in the case of the UN Secretariat – an acute liquidity crisis, may lead us into a detrimental downward spiral. We continue to need the best and the brightest for a diverse, skilled, high-performing and resilient workforce. This goal can be reached through a continued team effort involving ICSC leadership, management and staff federations.

This review will require a longer-term reflection on how to address the new realities, not only in a post-Covid world but also one with increasing and devastating conflicts, as well as one with the shifting expectations of a younger workforce. It must also take into account the challenging financial situation its impact on any publicly funded organization. We must find ways to be more efficient in the use of our resources, to continue to deliver on our mandates, and continue to provide strong support to the people we serve.

We have proven that we can innovate and adapt to a highly dynamic global environment, supporting and learning from each other. We are also in the process of embracing new opportunities such as the use of Artificial Intelligence in a manner that doesn't put the burden on staff, while diligently managing the associated risks. All these efforts should be done in partnership with our staff and their representatives. We count on your contributions, your ideas, in the HLCM context as well as in the ICSC framework and in staff-management consultations within your individual agencies.

As HLCM Chair I can assure you that the Committee and all its members are mindful of the concerns and needs of all personnel, and we are looking forward to continuing our dialogue and collaboration.

Let me thank you again for this opportunity to speak to you today. I wish you a successful and productive FICSA Council.