



United Nations Field Staff Union

24 October 2022

Brindisi

Opening Statement for the XXX UNFSU Council meeting on UN Day

Dear colleagues and friends,

We are very pleased to be able to welcome you all here in Brindisi, Italy to these fantastic conference facilities generously provided to us by the UNGSC.

This is the first time since our UNFSU Council meeting in November 2019 that we can meet each other again in person. Although we continued to function as a union and council through virtual interactions, the value of in-person interaction cannot be overstated.

This year's UNFSU council meeting will start with the provision of in-person training for our council members, two days will be dedicated to managing workplace harassment and bullying in the context of staff representation, and one day will be dedicated to mediation skills.

We are looking forward to learning from our instructor Mr Simon Ferrar who is an excellent trainer and facilitator with a practical background and track record in staff representation and unionism.

We wish to thank the United Nations Federal Credit Union for their generosity in sponsoring the provision of this training to our council members. The UNFCU has been this union's banking institution for many years. We wish to acknowledge their previous generous donations into our accounts for good causes and their excellent services to us a union, and our staff across the missions.

Today happens to be "our" UN day, 24 October, a day when we, as United Nations Staff, celebrate our organisation and honour our colleagues and friends that have given the ultimate sacrifice in the service of the organisation and the world.

This UN Day remarks the 77th year of the existence of the United Nations. This year's theme is about hope and global unity. At UNFSU, our motto since we took office in 2019 has been "Stronger Together", a motto compatible with the notion of global unity towards a world of peace and prosperity for all.





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Health, mental health, and well-being feature high on this year's UNFSU Council agenda, unsurprising when we see the emphasis on these topics reflected across the world following the Covid19 pandemic. The UNFSU executive has been no exception in terms of the effects of health-related problems. These past few years have been an eye-opener to all of us of how precious our own health and those of our family, friends, colleagues and loved ones are.

Mounting evidence suggests that mental health and well-being in the workplace are directly correlated with our workplace environment and organisational culture. Research has shown that toxic work environments are the number one contributor to burnout and mental health problems for workers.

A recently published guideline by the WHO and ILO on mental health at the workplace underscores the importance of this issue.

Very timely then to provide training to our duly elected staff representatives from the various UN Peacekeeping and Special Political Missions on how to deal with harassment and bullying in the workplace, which are huge contributors to the creation of toxic work environments.

This week we will be hearing from the UN Mental Health Strategy implementation lead, as well as from the WHO, about the recently published guidelines. We will also hear about initiatives at the UN System level about Occupational Health and Safety initiatives. We look forward as well to hearing from you, our staff representatives on the ground. About the conditions of work and life in the challenging environments that you all work in.

We must unite in the fight against toxic work environments to prevent our staff from developing mental health problems, we must demand better access to help for those that are already suffering, and we must do all we can to reduce stigma to reduce the number of people who are suffering in silence because they are afraid to speak up.

We must develop a zero tolerance to toxicity in our work environments so that we can all become, Stronger Together.

We look forward to inspirational training and fruitful discussion.

Sincerely,


Mark Polane
UNFSU President.

