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**Staff well-being
Statement to the Executive Board by
President Gilbert F. Houngbo**

Executive Board — 134th Session
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For: **Information**

Staff well-being

Statement to the Executive Board by

President Gilbert F. Houngbo

Distinguished delegates,

I am truly happy to introduce this agenda item and have the opportunity, particularly as we are getting close to year-end, which is an important moment for all of us, to reflect on the year past and the year to come.

In the past few years, IFAD has implemented reforms and decentralization, which is at the core of our discussion; we have put in place internal mobility and we are making our processes more effective and efficient wherever possible. At the same time, we know that we still have some capacity gaps. We need to continue working to fill those gaps.

These reforms are essential, but I recognize that they also have a significant impact on staff. On top of this, the pandemic has increased workloads and, we have to admit, has blurred the line between work and personal life.

Ensuring that staff feel understood, valued and supported through this process is essential.

The foundation of understanding is clear, open and constructive dialogue with staff. That is why we attach great importance to the change management process, which includes the need to hold regular forums to keep the conversation going, and ensure it is a true two-way conversation.

In those dialogues I regularly hear the challenges staff face, the questions they have. And I have made it a point to always be open to clarify decisions that sometimes may not be understood, particularly ensuring that those decisions are based on the direction that we need to take – which obviously includes strategic decisions and appointments.

Of course, we all know that our main asset is our staff. And IFAD remains almost unique in the UN system in terms of how we are supporting internal promotions in the last four years. Between 2017 and 2021, a quarter of staff have changed grade through promotion, recruitment or reassignment, a quarter of national officers and 10 per cent of General Service staff also have changed category to become international staff.

We are encouraging mobility, both for career growth and to increase our field presence. A comprehensive upskilling programme, based on a skill gap analysis, is filling our capability gap. We are working hard to ensure that our workforce is increasingly diverse. Other than a slight dip during the pandemic, our retention rate is high – although recently there have been some departures. Even while I personally wasn't necessarily pleased to see them go, I was nonetheless happy for these colleagues.

As our reforms continue, we are working to reduce the uncertainties that staff experience as part of this reform.

The job audit is causing quite a lot of concern right now. At the same time, it is very helpful in aligning job profiles with our field-based structure, with all positions classified independently by the UN's OneHR.

Over the last week, we have almost completed our annual exercise of converting some fixed-term contracts into indefinite appointments. This year, 80 staff – 10 per cent of the workforce – are eligible.

We have a serious problem in that over the past 15 to 20 years, we have accumulated a lot of staff in the field with UNDP contracts, particularly in countries where we have had to operate without a host country agreement. Globally speaking, holding a UNDP contract compared to an IFAD contract is less advantageous. Converting those into IFAD contracts obviously has a cost. Therefore we have been going slowly because of, as you

can imagine, the budget considerations. However, we are aiming to have all those conversions finalized by early 2022.

For General staff in positions affected by decentralization, we have suspended redundancy provisions, frozen external recruitment and created a reserve that will allow us, when a post has to be abolished, to ensure that staff do not lose their jobs. We will have time to place them in vacancies that will come up subsequently.

I wanted to share with you that, in a recent exchange, staff mentioned their desire to address the Board. Some of you will know – and I will also make it available to you – that there has been an open letter from staff in which they raise the structural question of their having the opportunity to address the Board, which I believe will be part of this discussion. In addition, last week there was a specific request for staff to address this current session of the Board on that issue.

The provision in the cooperation agreement between the Fund and the Staff Association is that “where the final decision by IFAD on a staff matter of general interest rests not with the President but with the Executive Board or ultimately the Governing Council, the Staff Association, through its duly authorized representative, may apply through the President and with his approval for access to the relevant governing body in order to present its views.”

While I recognize that the Staff Association has not applied to present an issue that is aligned with this provision, but has requested to be enabled to present staff perspectives on relevant organizational issues to the Executive Board, I have no objection if the Board so wishes for this to take place. I also hope that during the discussion we could even look into reviewing the existing texts to give the Staff Association an opportunity, perhaps once per year, to come before the Board to express its views on general staff-related matters.

With this, let me open the floor for any comments and questions you may have.