

João Antonio Felício

President
Président
Präsident
Presidente

**United Nations
Secretary-General
António Guterres
New York, NY 10027**
mmoller@unog.ch
jan.beagle@un.org

Sharan Burrow

General Secretary
Secrétaire générale
Generalsekretärin
Secretaria General

LEX/MS

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Respecting labour rights at the UN

Dear Secretary-General Guterres,

I write to you on behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), representing 202 million workers in 163 countries, to express our deep concern at the most recent attack on the fundamental labour rights of United Nations (UN) Staff.

We understand that the UN Office in Geneva (UNOG) is seeking to prevent UN staff from participating in industrial action to oppose the continuing degradation of pay and working conditions. In its communique to all staff, UNOG Director-General stated that “the Staff Regulations and Rules provide no basis for staff members to be absent from work because of a stoppage or strike.”

As you are undoubtedly aware, the right to strike is recognised by a number of international treaties and is enshrined in Article 8 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The right to strike is further protected by ILO Convention No. 87 on Freedom of Association. In addition, we remind you that the UN Administrative Tribunal and the ILO Administrative Tribunal have since several decades proclaimed the legitimacy of strike, the latter declaring in Judgement 615 that, “as a matter of principle, a strike is lawful.”

It is unacceptable that the UN does not recognise fundamental rights it is mandated to promote globally for its own staff. We call on you to support the right of UN Staff to take collective action, as decided by the Coordinating Committee for Staff Unions and Associations (CCISUA), and to reaffirm respect for the right to freedom association and collective bargaining within the UN System. In addition, we urge you to address longstanding concerns with respect to the flawed processes of the International Civil Service Commission.

We wish to remain informed about the actions undertaken to resolve this dispute.

Yours sincerely,



General Secretary