



*executive committee of
the directing council*

**PAN AMERICAN
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION**

*working party of
the regional committee*

**WORLD
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ORGANIZATION**



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STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE STAFF ASSOCIATION

The PAHO/WHO Staff Association addresses the following areas in this presentation: 1) hiring and retention of qualified staff; 2) post adjustment; 3) pensionable remuneration in duty stations with high inflation and currency devaluation; 4) consultation with staff on matters affecting contractual relations and security; 5) health insurance; 6) recruitment of women; 7) special study of advantages and disadvantages of contracts currently used by PAHO; and 8) creation of a tripartite working group.

The entry into the final decade of this century has made all staff aware of the need for concerted action to achieve the goals established for "Health for All by the Year 2000." The social, political, and economic problems of the Americas have heightened the role to be played by an international organization such as PAHO, and emphasized the need to maintain a high standard of well-qualified and dedicated staff.

The staff are conscious of their responsibility and the efforts of the Organization to maintain the levels of program delivery, despite increasing costs, and to increase the availability of funds from sources other than the regular PAHO contributions. The staff are proud to participate in the programs of "Health for All," and wish it to be more than a slogan.

The Staff Council, representing 21 local PAHO staff organizations, meeting in Guatemala in November 1989, passed 22 resolutions and made five recommendations. These have been forwarded to the Director for his information and consideration for action in certain specific areas. It

is the opinion of staff that continued success will require change, including an open exchange of ideas among Member Governments, the Administration, and staff representatives. Only through open discussions and fair evaluation can we become better employees and a better Organization. With these objectives in mind, the staff offer their observations and ask for the support of Member Governments to help PAHO achieve a more productive working relationship among Member Governments, the Administration and staff.

Over the last four years staff have seen dramatic changes in administrative practices in PAHO. Sometimes PAHO appears to follow the lead of other international agencies, but in very specific cases, which may adversely affect staff conditions of employment, PAHO is setting precedents. While it is understood that flexibility is needed to meet ever changing strategies for health, it should also be made clear that these changes require consultation with staff if the objectives are to be achieved.

Unfortunately, at a time when closer cooperation between management and staff is needed, there appears to be an ever increasing trend to exclude Staff from consultation on major issues of conditions of employment. The most recent example involved the sending of 30 PAHO staff members to participate in a non-health activity--the observation of the presidential elections in a Member Country.

Although most would agree that the intention to collaborate with other United Nations and Organization of American States staff was laudable, there were clearly serious questions as to the potential consequences in connection with the contractual status of staff and the insurance coverage of such staff; the use of funds intended for specific health activities for other purposes; the security of staff; and the absence of so many key country representatives from their direct responsibilities.

Our concern for staff safety was intensified because of the tragic loss of life of a national professional staff member in an airplane crash late in 1989. Unfortunately, the family and dependants of the staff member, at the time of this writing, have not yet been compensated due to the fact that no accident insurance had been provided.

The participation as observer in an election process and the intentions of the PAHO Administration were not discussed with staff, prior to implementation of the decision, nor with staff representatives. In addition, an arbitrary selection of participants was made. It is considered that the last minute dispatch of 30 health professionals from PAHO in this manner to join approximately 2,000 other election observers was irregular, and the arguments put forward to rationalize their participation were unsatisfactory. In addition, the Legal Counsel of

the Association considered this activity clearly outside the context of staff contractual agreements and beyond the mandate of the PAHO Constitution, and thus a matter of extreme concern to the Association because of the precedent that has been established.

On the subject of conditions of employment, some positive movements to improve professional base salaries and post adjustment were initiated. For the first time in 15 years, professional base salaries were increased. The average increase of 5% is appreciated, but many consider it too little and too late. Post adjustment also was unfrozen for the first time in almost five years.

The Association has supported the comprehensive review of professional remuneration conducted under the auspices of the UN General Assembly and the International Civil Service Commission, through the creation of working groups with staff participation. It is hoped that the review will continue in this manner until it has been completed.

However, many professional staff, particularly physicians and other professionals with specialized occupations, are dismayed at the manner of implementation of salaries in connection with the comparator civil service. Whereas salaries for professional staff may appear high to certain representatives of Member Governments, it must be realized that, in the Headquarters area for example, these reflect the high prevailing costs. In addition, the comparator civil service provides additional supplements (physicians, for example, in the United States Public Health Service can receive as much as \$20,000), which are not reflected in the current UN salary scales. This situation would appear neither to satisfy the Noblemaire Principle, nor provide true comparability of remuneration. Furthermore, it is evident that neither US nor UN professional salaries over the years have maintained comparability with private sector counterparts in the United States of America. It is sufficient to quote one PAHO government representative who said that the 28.6% differential "leaves the international civil service in the unenviable position of being held hostage to a single member state's policies towards its national civil service. This was clearly never the intention of the Noblemaire principle."1/

Because of the particular situation in the Region, where many countries are facing extreme economic problems and constant inflation and devaluation, the support of the Governing Bodies is requested. Help is needed to find solutions to conditions of employment problems which face staff stationed in many duty stations throughout the Americas. We are particularly concerned at the loss of purchasing power of pensionable

1/ APS Newsletter, January/February 1990, No. 116, Page 2.

remuneration for general service staff in duty stations where high inflation and currency devaluations occur frequently. Current compensation mechanisms are so slow that United Nations staff have been driven to the brink of strikes over the last few years. Similarly in the case of National Contract Staff, a strike threat in 1990 was required in a Member Country to obtain action necessary to make up months of constant salary losses due to inflation and exchange rate problems.

The Staff Association considers it necessary that a special study be carried out on the advantages and disadvantages of the various types of personnel contracts currently being utilized by PAHO. The Association believes that such a study might yield solutions to problems of 1) lower productivity; 2) difficulty with hiring and retaining top level staff; 3) hidden legal, administrative and training costs; 4) hidden costs to Member Governments related to diminishing contributors to the United Nations Pension Fund; and 5) unacceptable conditions of employment related to lack of insurance and enrollment in social security or pension systems.

The Staff Association favors improved staff productivity and improved quality of technical cooperation, as well as overall remuneration in line with reasonable, fair and timely comparisons with the comparator civil service. The Staff Association wants to be a participating member in changes necessary at PAHO. The staff want to make a positive contribution toward "Health for All."

The Staff Association and FICSA designated 1990 as the "Year of Recruitment and Advancement of Women." We want PAHO to be a frontrunner in the employment of professional women in health. We are confident that you share this goal in regard to the participation of women. Women's views on health matters will be a contributing factor in the formula for improved technical cooperation.

It is worth noting that during 1989 a further joint meeting on the WHO Staff Health Insurance was held in Geneva. Significant in this activity was the first actuarial review of the global health insurance program. The staff appreciates the position taken by the Administration in relation to the increased cost sharing to the benefit of staff. However, the Association is concerned at the impact on retired staff for whom improved solutions should be sought in the future.

An unresolved issue relates to the matter of an ombudsman. The number of appeals continues and the need for a mediating mechanism to reduce this process remains. The Association cannot understand why this large region of WHO fails to implement the ombudsman system in consonance with other Regions of the World Health Organization and other international organizations in the Washington area.

Regrettably, the number of appeals has not decreased and in the past year there have been more industrial actions or threatened industrial actions than ever before.

The staff believes that conditions of employment can be improved, and at the same time, administrative objectives attained, with mutual cooperation among the Member Governments, the Administration, and the staff using approaches much in line with the tripartite working groups of the United Nations Pension Fund and Professional Remuneration Review.

The PAHO/WHO Staff Association Council in November 1989 asked its Executive Committee to bring to the PAHO Executive Committee a proposal to establish a tripartite working group of Member Governments, the Administration, and staff representatives to review matters where decisions being taken by Member Governments impact on the conditions of employment of staff. The Staff Association asks your support in giving a tripartite effort a chance to improve staff productivity and technical cooperation, as well as staff conditions of employment. The Staff Association stands ready to work toward common goals.