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**STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
PAHO/WHO STAFF ASSOCIATION**

On this occasion the Staff Association would like to highlight the positive aspects of the relationship with the Administration throughout the past year. Actions such as the creation of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) and participation of a staff representative in the retreat of the Director's Cabinet demonstrate the improved relations. The Staff Association will present the issues which have lingered since the last presentation in 1995. These issues include the relocation of the Association's offices and an update on gender issues. Special attention is given to the General Services Salary Scale Compression exercise and the impact it has had on staff. The Association will illustrate the problems which have arisen with the publication of the exercise outcome and the lack of complete information. Finally, the Staff Association will present suggestions on how to cooperate in finding solutions to the financial situation now confronting the Organization.

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1. Introduction

This presentation to the members of the PAHO Executive Committee is made on the basis of an agreement approved by the Member Governments, in order that they hear the opinion of the staff on matters that directly or indirectly affect the staff and the Organization.

2. Staff Management Relations

The election of Dr. George A. O. Alleyne as Director has greatly improved the Administration/Staff Association relations. The Director has encouraged the staff to become active members in the Staff Association by exercising their right to choose their representatives and become more involved.

The Director has also demonstrated his openness to staff concerns and has been available to meet with the Staff Association each time a meeting has been requested. There have also been occasions that the Director has called meetings with staff representatives. The Director has also met with staff in Headquarters and field offices on several occasions to share his vision of the Organization as well as his concerns about its future. The dialogue between the Administration and the Staff Representatives has been fruitful.

In the 116th Meeting of the PAHO Executive Committee (June 1995), there was left pending further clarification regarding the last payment to the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Fund (UNJSPF) related to the closing of the Pan American Zoonoses Center (CEPANZO). As a result of direct negotiations between the staff and the Administration, the Organization realized disbursements 25% lower than the UNJSPF required, and the staff affected were satisfied—a clear example of how open dialogue can lead to a win-win situation.

At the request of the Staff Association, the Director approved the creation of the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), which includes participants appointed by the Director as well as by the Staff Association. The JAC is now operational and has had two meetings—in which the membership developed rules of procedure for the Committee and established a work plan.

The Staff Association was pleased to accept the invitation of the Director to participate in the Cabinet retreat on 2 February 1996. It was the first time that the Association had been asked to take part in this type of activity, where Cabinet members reviewed the Organization's performance over the past year and addressed the challenges PAHO will face in the future. After the retreat, the Director requested suggestions from

each Division, and from the Staff Association, to deal with the current financial situation of the Organization.

3. Staff Concerns

In spite of the great improvement in the Staff/Administration relations, there are still many issues to be resolved. Those addressed below represent the most important concerns of staff.

3.1 Pending Matters

Last year the Staff Association presented a list of issues which needed to be addressed in conjunction with the Administration. Although the list has been significantly reduced, some important issues are still pending solution.

3.1.1 *Relocation of the Staff Association Offices*

For many years, the Staff Association offices have been located outside of the PAHO main building. Currently, the Staff Association shares space with the Office of Publications and Editorial Services in the Watergate complex, a 15-minute walk from the main building. These accommodations continue to deny staff easy access to the Association's services. The isolation of the Staff Association offices, combined with the nature of the work performed by the staff representatives, which is a part-time activity, make it difficult to support the logistics of communications and meetings.

The Administration agrees that the present location is unsatisfactory and offered the Association space in the Columbia Plaza complex across the street from the Headquarters building. The square footage of the space offered was not sufficient to meet the minimum required to accommodate the office furniture and files of the Association. Subsequently, in a meeting with the Director, the possibility of using modular furniture was explored. Unfortunately, the space in Columbia Plaza was no longer available.

The Staff Association requests the Administration to continue searching for a space, if possible in the main PAHO building. The choice of a new location should be based on the objective of bringing the Association closer to the majority of its members stationed in Washington.

3.1.2 *Non-Participation in the Reclassification Committee*

During the 1970s the staff participated, through a representative appointed by the Staff Association, in the Advisory Committee on Post Reclassification. In 1977, the

Director changed the rule to preclude the participation of the staff representatives because, in his view, the reclassification of posts was a management tool, and staff participation is not appropriate to this type of process. Currently, there is no representation of staff in the Advisory Committee on Post Reclassification. Conversely, the WHO Staff Association in Geneva continues to maintain the right to appoint representatives to that Committee.

3.1.3 *Compression of the General Services Salary Scale in Washington*

On 11 April 1995, the Chief of Personnel requested the Staff Association to designate two representatives and two alternates to participate in the Compression of the General Services salary scale in Washington, D.C. This exercise was designed to change the General Services salary scale from the existing eight-grade salary structure to a seven-grade salary structure, in compliance with a recommendation of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). In order to obtain more information about this exercise, the Staff Association asked for a meeting with the Department of Personnel.

At this meeting, the Staff Association learned that a working group would decide whether to use either the classification standard for Headquarters or that for non-Headquarters duty stations. After this determination, the group would review the post description of each General Services post in Washington, occupied and vacant, and assign a classification point value to the duties of each post. This exercise would then be followed by a comprehensive General Services salary survey, at which time the newly classified posts would be used to compare with prevailing salary conditions in the area. After this comparison, a compressed seven-grade salary scale would result.

As much as the Staff Association wanted to participate in this process, it had to decline the invitation, as it was presented, for the following reasons:

- The classification of posts is an administrative act which must be carried out in accordance with the existing rules and regulations and manual provisions of the Organization, which are found in Parts II.1.95 through II.1.110 of the WHO Manual (particularly those pages which specifically relate to PAHO).
- According to these provisions, recommendations about classification are made by the Classification Unit of the Personnel Department and forwarded to the appropriate Advisory Committee on Post Reclassification (one for General Services posts and one for Professional posts up to grade P4). The Advisory Committees then forward their recommendations to either the Director (for Professional posts) or the Chief of Administration (for General Services posts) for

a decision. Recommendations for P5 posts, as well as those resulting from general studies, are forwarded directly from the Classification Unit to the Director or the Chief of Administration for decision.

- In view of this legislation, having an ad hoc group meet to recommend classifications is not legal. Since arguably one of the most important tasks of the Staff Association is to assure the proper application of the Staff Rules and the Manual Provisions, it was impossible for the Staff Association to appoint representatives to participate under the initial proposal.

The alternative offered by the Staff Association favored reestablishing the Manual Provision, as it was prior to 1977, to allow the participation of staff representatives in both committees.

The Staff Association believes that the PAHO community would be best served, both now and in the future, by revising the procedures to include staff representation in the Advisory Committee on Post Reclassification, as outlined in the preceding paragraph.

The compression exercise, which comprised the reclassification of 317 posts, was completed and a seven-grade salary scale was established. The result was that out of 317 posts, 29 were reclassified upward and 33 downward. The remaining 255 posts were left unchanged, that is, they were assigned a grade one number lower than that they held in the eight-grade scale. The staff reacted negatively to this exercise because the reclassification report was not shared with them, in spite of requests from the Staff Association and individual staff members. The Director initially indicated that, because there was no staff representation in the ad hoc committee, the Staff Association was not entitled to receive a copy of the report.

At a later date, the Department of Personnel provided the representatives of the Washington staff a summary of the exercise, giving post distribution prior to and after the exercise. As a consequence of the lack of information, the staff did not entirely understand the outcome of the exercise. Approximately 60 staff members filed appeals to obtain additional information in order to clarify the reclassification of their posts.

3.1.4 *Gender Issues*

The United Nations (UN) secretariat has recently emitted a policy for the achievement of gender equality (ST/AI/412, 5 January 1996) which indicates special measures applicable to the recruitment, appointment, and promotion of women to posts at the Professional level and above. The General Assembly urged the Secretary-General to implement this policy. This policy provides examples that could help PAHO continue to make progress in this important area at this time of economic difficulties.

For instance, Item 5 of the UN policy states that exceptions to the recruitment freeze at the UN, will be considered in a more favorable light if the recommended candidate is a woman. Item 9 indicates that external vacancy announcements for the P 5 level and above may be waived when fully qualified and suitable women candidates are identified within the UN.

The UN policy also states that each unit will be responsible for maintaining statistics showing current distribution of women and men at each level and category. It seems plausible that PAHO could adopt a similar policy.

In PAHO, data from previous studies show that progress has been made toward improving the number of women in decision-making positions. In 1986, 76% of PAHO Professional staff were male and 24% were female; by the end of 1995, 34% were female, and 66% were male. The Association recognizes the gains made in Headquarters of professional women in high managerial positions. However, in spite of the progress, the overwhelming majority of decision-makers continue to be male. Professional women at PAHO are still in a minority and face many difficulties related to career advancement.

Data from the 1993 study on barriers to the advancement of women in PAHO show that men in management positions continue to have stereotyped preconceptions about the ability of women. Yet the study found that few men recognize this. There is an urgent need to continue sensitizing decision-makers about the competence of women in the Organization.

The results of the barriers study particularly addressed the issue of recruitment and selection. However, there are many questions still unanswered by the study. It would be useful to examine the factors that contribute to gender discrimination and to identify the aspects of cultural background in the Organization which contribute to this phenomenon. The study needs to be continued, and it is important to involve all of the Staff in an open discussion of the measures that could be taken to sustain the progress made and continue to advance toward gender equity in the Organization.

As was evidenced in the recent compression of the General Services salary scale in Headquarters, many decisions are made without adequately involving and consulting with those affected. This process affected many women because the majority of the General Services staff are women. It seems that few of the persons affected in this process were involved in making-decisions which affected them. It also seems that the process lacked unifying criteria and transparency.

The Staff Association considers it a priority to examine the conditions of women at PAHO and would welcome the opportunity to integrate a joint task force with the Department of Personnel to examine the situation of women in the General Services

category, particularly in the light of the recent compression exercise; and to carry out further studies of the barriers for the advancement of women both in the Professional and General Services categories.

The policy on sexual harassment is an important measure. It provides a legal and administrative framework for women and men in the Organization. It would also be useful to provide guidelines for the prevention of inappropriate behavior and to implement a learning process approach to promote healthy working relations and behavior for men and women in the Organization.

3.2 *Financial Situation*

The Staff Association was invited by the Director to make proposals on options to reduce the budget of the Organization by approximately US\$ 45 million. The Staff Association considers this difficult financial situation as an opportunity to painstakingly revise the Organization's overall work program, as well as the quality of the services provided to its Member States. The Staff Association wholeheartedly supports responsible efforts to improve PAHO's way of doing business. By streamlining procedures and their impact on expenditures, the Organization can reduce the financial deficit. In addition, this would set PAHO on the path of pursuing an approach of excellence, equality, effectiveness, and accountability. At the same time, the Staff Association would never support any change that would compromise the quality of PAHO programs of technical cooperation and thus negatively affect the well-being of the Region's population solely for deficit reduction purposes.

The Staff Association has expressed constant concern with post reductions by freezing or eliminating non-occupied posts, even if these actions do not negatively affect active staff. Unfortunately, in the long run these reductions could jeopardize the Organization's efforts to carry out the same work program with less resources. The Staff Association became very concerned after learning that the Organization is cutting occupied posts by offering mutual separation agreements in the field offices, especially in the Centers.

The Association's foremost concern is the security and welfare of all staff. Equally important for the Staff Association is the potential loss of the Organization's ability to provide quality services and effective assistance to the Member States. Reducing staff and increasing the workload of the remaining staff will inevitably create stressful situations, reduce morale even further, and consequently reduce productivity. At present, there is a lack of incentives and advancement opportunities. There are ways to stimulate and motivate staff, including special recognition of worthy individuals and seminars geared toward uplifting staff morale and team-building. These positive actions would help make staff feel more personally satisfied in their workplace.

The Staff Association is aware of the urgent need to reach responsible solutions to the financial situation. Therefore, before the Organization considers reducing staff as a way of reducing the deficit, the Staff Association would like to highlight other areas where real savings could be effected:

- *Travel Expenditures.* Avoid high-cost air fare and fees due to last-minute itinerary changes. This can be achieved by proper planning and adherence to scheduled duty travel. Also by combining more than one assignment in a given trip, savings can be obtained in air fare and per diem. Another possibility is to make one long trip rather than two or three short trips within the same area.
- *Recruitment of Consultants.* The practice of rehiring retirees as long-term consultants/advisors prevents career development and growth of active staff. In addition, this practice has a negative effect on the pension and staff health insurance funds.
- *Temporaries.* Freeze the hiring of temporaries and reallocate current resources to other programs or posts.
- *PAHO/Government Agreements.* Renegotiate agreements with Member Governments for them to absorb larger portions of Representations' expenses for utilities (water, electricity, gas, telephone), security services, grounds and building maintenance, and gas and oil for vehicles.
- *Equipment, Furniture, Building Alterations, and General Expenses.* Avoid incurring unnecessary expenses. As examples of expenses to avoid, the Staff Association has learned of the Organization's intent to purchase a new telephone system and replace the sound system in Conference Room A. The existing telephone system is in good working condition and functions efficiently. Incurring unnecessary expenditures during financially difficult times is irresponsible and would convey the wrong message to staff and to Member States.

The Staff Association recognizes that the financial deficit could force the Organization to downsize. In that event, the Staff Association requests the Organization to consider providing counseling services and training to staff for possible reassignment within PAHO or for job opportunities outside PAHO. The uncertainty of the existing conditions has the potential of creating various levels of anxiety, stress, and depression among the staff. This situation has occurred in other international organizations, including WHO.

The Staff Association views the prospect of a reduced budget as the equivalent of a reduction of programs. A reduction of programs will directly or indirectly affect

the welfare of staff. The uncertainty of this situation has already begun creating an atmosphere of job insecurity and low morale among the staff in the Organization.

4. Conclusion

In order to surpass the present stressful situation, the Staff Association would like to ensure that the level of dialogue with the Administration continues to improve. Through bilateral efforts, many of the issues and concerns of staff can be handled in a manner which will prove positive for the Organization and the staff.