

*executive committee of
the directing council*

PAN AMERICAN
HEALTH
ORGANIZATION



*working party of
the regional committee*

WORLD
HEALTH
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STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PAHO/WHO STAFF ASSOCIATION

Once again, we should like to thank the members of the Executive Committee for the opportunity for the Staff Association to present its opinions on certain matters pertaining to the staff, and the current situation within the Organization. First, however, it would seem appropriate to take this opportunity to formally congratulate the Director on his reelection to a new term of office as Director of PAHO, and to express the hope that the procedures initiated during his first term of office can be developed and expanded to improve the extent of dialogue and the resolution of problems within the Organization on matters of concern and interest to the staff.

1. National Contracts

There is little doubt that the approach being proposed by the Organization in this area is perhaps the one consuming issue of importance with respect to contractual status of PAHO staff at the present time. Following the considerable discussion at the 97th Meeting of the PAHO Executive Committee, and the subsequent passage of Resolution XIX at the XXII Pan American Sanitary Conference in September 1986, further consideration has been given to the implementation of this format for the recruitment and hiring of local national staff. During the course of the months following the passage of Resolution XIX, members of the Staff Association have worked with members of the Administration to review a set of proposed rules for the implementation of the national contracts, and these are fundamentally the rules which you see before you in the document presented by the Administration on personnel matters (Provisional Agenda Item 5.5). As a result of the discussions during the 97th Meeting of the PAHO Executive Committee and the subsequent Pan American Sanitary Conference, considerable modifications have been made in the proposed approach for the recruitment of personnel under such contracts. Firstly, they have become known as "national contracts" and, secondly, through the resolution of the Pan American Sanitary Conference, certain limitations have been proposed for the use of these contracts.

The need for review and monitoring of the implementation of such contracts has also been included. Nevertheless, the Staff Association continues to be concerned at the methodology being utilized for the employment of such personnel and the potential problems that may arise for the Organization.

Whereas we recognize, and appreciate, the need for the Organization to mobilize national resources and to utilize funds most effectively for the implementation of projects and activities in the countries, we see inherent dangers in the employment of national personnel whose selection process does not necessarily follow the criteria for normal local PAHO employees, but who may eventually be performing similar activities. It would seem that, in this regard, the basic fundamental principle of "equal pay for equal work," will be in jeopardy and potentially lead to conflicting local situations.

The global nature of the proposed rules being presented to you by the Administration would appear to ignore, or minimize, the characteristics and nature of PAHO staff and the relative aspirations of staff members who join this Organization. It is felt that a clear understanding needs to exist, and an appropriate differentiation made, between staff who may be:

- a) contracted to perform a specific activity over a limited period of time;
- b) contracted to provide a service over a long period of time in which career aspirations and implications exist;
- c) contracted to provide routine service functions which may be of long or short duration but in which no career aspirations or implications may exist.

The implication that the currently proposed contracts will be primarily for general service staff and be of limited duration, and hence not involve the potential for career advancement, or even entry into the formal staff of the Organization, would appear to be in conflict with certain of the contracts currently available in the field. In addition, the establishment of a category of employee which, to all intents and appearances, would appear to be a PAHO employee, but who is responsible to national courts and authorities, and who may be responsive to national bodies (such as associations or unions), would affect the application of rules and procedures established by the local PAHO office. We reiterate our concern that through this mechanism the Organization will lose certain of its immunities in countries and become involved in local litigation. Such litigation and application of local laws could more than negate the professed attractiveness of the cost savings of these types of contracts.

As a result of these concerns, the Association has suggested that specific contracts be developed, by country, in order that the full

implications of labor laws, and the potential liability of the Organization within the concept of such labor laws can be taken into consideration. In addition, the Association has suggested that a local appeals mechanism exist and in the event of a reduction in force or reduction in country staff, such national contract employees be released prior to the regular staff members of PAHO. Both these points were rejected by the Administration. The Association considers that, where such national staff are to be contracted, every available effort should be made to utilize existing mechanisms within the UN System. If such mechanisms are not appropriate, then "national contracts" should clearly identify duration, renewability, and career possibilities, as well as be monitored and reported annually to the Governing Bodies.

A general concern continues in the potential impact upon the Organization through conversion of posts to "national contracts," and in particular the erosion of the potential base for the PAHO health insurance and pension benefit program. The fact that existing filled posts should not be converted to national contracts will no doubt impede this to a certain extent. Nevertheless, it is considered that a clear definition should be made as to the percentage or extent of such staff in country locations, and/or the extent to which PAHO/WHO regular funds can be used for such national contracting activities, with an identification of the limits in each case and location.

Once again, we would like to repeat our interest in collaborating in all positive approaches which will assist countries to mobilize national resources and to implement activities for the improvement of health of the populations of the Americas and for the improved working of the Organization, but we feel that there is a continuing and important role at this time to establish clearer and more extensive guidelines and an effective monitoring system in conjunction with the Administration and the Governing Bodies of the Organization.

2. Women's Rights

Concern continues relative to the employment of women within the Organization and improvement of the working conditions for such staff. It would appear that, despite the efforts in recent years, there is still minimal participation of women in key posts and at decision-making levels. A document was submitted to the Director in 1986 which identified the situation within the Organization and illustrated the imbalance and disproportionate distribution of posts according to sex.

Additional efforts should be made to encourage the entry of qualified professional women into the Organization, and, in this regard, it would seem appropriate to give particular consideration to the recent UN interest relative to the employment of spouses. The ability to provide employment and facilities for both members of a family may provide greater interest and incentives for women of proven ability to enter into agencies of the United Nations System, particularly in the area of health.

3. Financial Crisis in the UN

The problem of the financial crisis within the United Nations System appears to have continued without solution or, apparently, new approaches to remedy the situation, even though certain individual situations may have been partially resolved. Once again, we express our concern at the need to recruit highly qualified and technically competent and competitive staff while reaffirming our objections to those presentations and announcements which appear to place the primary responsibility for the problem upon the cost of staff within the international civil service system. We, therefore, will continue to support the attempts to appeal arbitrary and illegal cuts made on pensions and the attempts to reduce other benefits while not respecting the acquired rights of staff.

4. Health Insurance

The staff were relieved to note during the course of the year that, in conjunction with WHO Geneva, a stop-loss insurance policy was made available to the health insurance fund to cover potential costs exceeding the \$50,000 limit in cases of major surgery. This has gone some way towards alleviating the staff's concerns, in contrast to a period in which no specific coverage existed for such costs. However, there is still further need to ensure that such policies are clarified and made available for review, so that staff members can fully understand any limitations on conditions or coverage. Additional efforts need to be made to make the PAHO staff health insurance an attractive benefit and to obtain the best coverage for the contributions involved.

The WHO Health Insurance Program was reviewed at a meeting called by the Director-General of WHO in Geneva in July 1985. The Association considers it appropriate that reviews be made of other insurances available to PAHO staff members, in order to ensure that all such programs are now brought up to date within the light of current conditions and practices, so that maximum benefits can be obtained from the policies in force.

5. Staff Morale

I should like to draw the attention of the Governing Bodies to the question of staff morale. As you are fully aware, during the course of the past year, there have been several industrial actions by other Associations as a result of factors affecting staff remuneration and conditions of work. The continuing environment in which agencies are repeatedly cutting posts owing to budget reductions or shortfalls in contributions; the apparent increasing interference by countries in personnel matters of the Organizations; the fact that the professional staff have received no increase in base salary for the past 10 years, and that salaries have been frozen since 1984, combined with the relatively limited career potential within the Organization, are major contributory factors.

The current financial situation has resulted in frozen posts, frozen job reclassifications, frozen salaries, limitations on training and unfulfilled staff expectations.

These, combined with inconsistency of administrative and management decisions and lack of information, are cumulative factors leading to poor staff morale.

It is important that the Governing Bodies realize the situation in view of the obvious limitations of agencies to increase budgets in a world in which the majority of the nations of the UN System can be said to have fiscal problems. New and more imaginative approaches need to be adopted. Similarly, circumstances would appear to signal that a new era of collaboration should be at hand in which greater responsibilities would seem to be there for the Governments to participate in the implementation of programs by the agencies to which they belong. In PAHO, particularly, a new relationship with the Member Governments could arise with the initiation of the national contract program. Such a program would appear to involve countries much more in the direct monitoring and implementation of programs in which national personnel are to be involved. It is, therefore, important that countries understand the full ramifications of the interrelationship between the Governing Bodies, the Administration, the staff of the Organization, and the responsibility of individual Member Countries, such that consistent positions are taken in international fora which will enable results to come from coordinated efforts and activities.

PAHO has considerable expertise and equity in the staff and in the information and systems developed within the Organization. It would seem appropriate for the Member Governments to fully utilize these available human resources in such a way that new financial support can be brought to the Organization, apart from the regular system of quota contributions.

The preceding remarks are intended to contribute in a positive manner to the intense efforts within the last four years to improve the level of dialogue within the Organization; to encourage participation of the staff in resolving internal problems; and to make suggestions for the improvement of working conditions. The institution of regular annual meetings of staff to analyze working conditions, and the improved opportunities for dialogue for staff and Administration officials at all levels within the HQS office and in the Field, have become a reality. Nevertheless, there is still much to be done so that the problems identified in such meetings are acted upon and resolved, and a sense of creativity and leadership restored to PAHO. Actions must be taken such that the Organization can once again become competitive and attractive for the highest levels of competence. We consider a first step in that process is to provide the conditions to improve staff morale.

The Association is interested and willing to work with the Administration to improve this situation, improve the delivery of technical assistance to Member Countries, and identify approaches to reduce unnecessary costs.

Once again, on behalf of the PAHO staff, I thank you for the opportunity to bring these concerns to your attention, and I am available for any questions you may wish to raise.