



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



132nd SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Washington, D.C., USA, 23-27 June 2003

Provisional Agenda Item 6.2

CE132/27 (Eng.)
28 April 2003
ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PASB STAFF ASSOCIATION

The Staff Association presentation to the 132nd Session of the Executive Committee is geared toward the views of the Staff Association on matters that concern the staff and, therefore, the Organization. The issues contained in this document were discussed during the XXII Council Meeting of the Staff Association, held in Bridgetown, Barbados on 4-8 November 2002.

The issues covered in this document relate to the security of the staff, classification of duty stations, partnership, joint disciplinary board, harassment, ombudsman, joint advisory committee and staff career development.

The Staff Association respectfully requests the Executive Committee members to review our suggestions and proposals for consideration. We make this request with the conviction that the Association, through safeguarding the wellbeing of the staff, is also a participant in the constant improvement of the quality of the Organization's services and cooperation to Member States.

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Introduction

1. The PAHO/WHO Staff Association appreciates the opportunity to present issues concerning staff to the PAHO Executive Committee members. We believe it is important not only to inform you about issues of concern but to let you know of the strides that have been made in staff-management relations since our last presentation. As you know, we are living in a world of continual change and staff are an important part of an Organization's successful quest for change. This year, in particular, is one of remarkable strides in the 100 year history of the Organization with the election of the first woman Director. We salute and applaud the Organization's governing bodies who took such a bold step in electing Dr. Mirta Roses. As you know, Dr. Roses' vision for PAHO entailed the restructuring of the Bureau. This restructuring is being accomplished with the participation of staff in various discussion groups. This is a very commendable gesture of our new Director. As she has often said, she believes in "One Organization, One Team". The Staff Association looks forward to continuing as part of the team. We look forward to continued dialogue and building on our "partnership" to ensure the value of the Organization's chief resource; its staff.

2. The Staff Association would like to focus on those issues of utmost importance. Some of the topics were scheduled to be discussed during the Global Staff Management Council (GSMC) meeting which was planned for March 2003 but was postponed until October 2003 due to the political crisis at that time.

Vision of the Staff Association

3. The Association is taking steps to provide an avenue to include as members all individuals that work for the Organization. Currently, only staff with UN conditions of employment are eligible for membership in the Staff Association. Incorporating non-UN staff has proven to be a very challenging undertaking because of the different contractual status of these staff. Many of these staff have been employed by PAHO for several years and have become a source of competency and expertise for the Organization. We want to include them in the association and they want to be included as members of the association.

Security

4. Security has become an issue of great concern to all of us. Those of us who live in regions that once were considered safe are now having second thoughts. The situation of staff in the field is of great concern to the Staff Association. We believe that the Organization has a responsibility to the locally recruited staff in offices where safety and security are particularly difficult to assure. We urge the Administration to take the utmost

care to ensure that these staff and their families receive the same type of support as internationally recruited staff. We understand that at times there is a delay in the classification of duty stations in cases where security and the threat of violence are present. We are aware that PAHO has implemented some guidelines for staff in case of an alert. Our field offices rely on the instructions from the resident UN offices and we believe that the Organization should ensure that measures are in place to provide security/procedures for all staff at each duty station.

Classification of Duty Stations

5. Due to the decline in the purchasing power of their salaries, staff in certain field offices are experiencing extreme difficulty in their living conditions. We are aware that our salary scales are governed by WHO policy. Staff feel that some interim measure needs to be created by the Organization to ease the strain of providing the basic needs for their families in view of the decline of the local currency due to inflation and devaluation factors. The gradual and systematic deterioration of the salaries of the General Services (GS) and National Professional Officers (NPO) staff since the year 2000 is due to several reasons including political and economic situations. The most devastating occurrence has been the devaluation of local currencies and inflation which has resulted from the devaluation process and reflected in the variation of the Consumer Price Index (CPI). During the Staff Association's Annual Council Meeting in November, several delegates reported that the devaluations in their countries ranged from 100% to 350% and inflation higher than 30%. The mandate from the Council is to request that the Organization develop an internal mechanism to deal with this type of situation that would compensate the GS and NPO staff for the loss of the purchasing power of their salaries in countries that are in economic crisis. The drastic currency devaluation also affects the value of pension contributions and future pension benefits. This situation was also included in the Staff Association's presentation to PAHO's Executive Committee last year.

Partnership

6. The concept of partnership between staff and management was to be presented by the Staff Associations at the next GSMC meeting. We believe that this will benefit both the Organization and Staff Association as the decision making process is based on openness and transparency. We believe that it will also strengthen the relationships between staff at all levels as dialogues are engaged in a spirit of genuine respect, confidence and trust.

7. The PAHO Staff Association has been a proponent of collective bargaining for many years and we gave emphasis to that position last year. At the same time, we shared our view of partnership when we said, "we believe that the application of the principle of

partnership with the staff will achieve greater credibility, accountability, tolerance, and better understanding among PAHO/WHO staff and advance the culture of trust and cooperation". We look forward to developing the partnership concept further.

Joint Disciplinary Board

8. This is another topic that is being introduced by all WHO staff associations and is to be discussed during the next GSMC meeting. The Joint Disciplinary Board has already been established in other agencies of the United Nations and the general framework for a reliable conflict resolution system has been drafted and submitted to the GSMC members for further discussion. This should provide basic requirements of due process to be afforded a staff member against whom misconduct is alleged. This is an important element that is required in order to ensure that adequate and consistent procedures are followed in each situation. A code of conduct/ethics should be developed which could serve as a foundation for the establishment of this Joint Disciplinary Board.

Harassment

9. We are pleased to report that the harassment policy is in the final drafting stages. In a meeting with the Director and our Area Manager on HRM a commitment was agreed upon to have a harassment policy written by June 2003. The objective of this policy is to foster a respectful workplace through the prevention and prompt resolution of harassment. This policy is important to all of us and we look forward to the implementation, orientation and training component of the policy.

Ombudsman

10. The status and criteria of the ombudsman has been a topic of discussion with staff and management during the monthly Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) meetings and most recently with Dr. Roses. It is interesting to note that there is an International Ombudsman Institute which is located at the Faculty of Law of the University of Alberta in Edmonton (108 countries are among its membership) and the United States Ombudsman Association which is located in Nashville, Tennessee. Both may serve as a resource for selection/training of an Ombudsman. The position of Ombudsman has been in existence for many years and has evolved into a career position in all realms of government, military, corporations and society at large. Recently, we received communications from Staff Associations in the field offices informing us that they would like to have the services of the Ombudsman available to them as well. We strongly support this request. We look forward to our continued collaboration with the Organization on this topic.

Joint Advisory Committee - JAC

11. We consider these meetings with the Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) to be very beneficial and informative. The committee has been on a sabbatical due to a number of unresolved circumstances. The terms of reference for this committee are under review. We note the need to establish a meeting calendar and to provide for the participation of alternate committee members when the designated member cannot attend. Our dialogue in this forum will continue.

Staff Career Development

12. Last year, our presentation included a commentary on staff career development as part of the Human Resources Management Reform that is an on-going process for WHO and PAHO. Although this topic will be discussed at the next GSMC meeting with our counterparts, we would like to share our thoughts with you. It is our position that all staff are entitled to have access to career development. This will help to ensure that the Organization not only hires but also retains and develops the most able individuals with the best qualifications to deliver the services required. What better way to ensure that the Organization's staff maintains a high caliber of knowledge and expertise than through its encouragement of equal opportunity at all levels of employment. A career development path should be created to accommodate all staff. For instance, National Officers have the possibility of being assimilated as Professional Staff and we believe that the same opportunities should be available to the General Services Staff. One way to ensure commitment to values and competencies is to implement a policy that enhances career development throughout the Organization. Another component of career development can be skills development for professional staff, which can be achieved through special arrangements with a university or through an on-line study program. The Virtual Campus in Public Health, which PAHO recently launched, can be considered as a vehicle of upward mobility for staff training at all levels. Additionally, staff should be given the opportunity to participate in professional certification programs – similar to the one offered in the procurement field. The programs are administered by the Institute for Supply Management. The two programs are Certified Purchasing Manager (C.P.M.) for experienced purchasing and supply managers and the Accredited Purchasing Practitioner (A.P.P.) for entry level buyers. Upon completion of the professional certification program, the certification should be deemed acceptable and considered equivalent to a bachelor or masters degree. The staff member could be promoted based on specified years of service and completion of the certification program in lieu of the degree requirements. All the above, would improve staff expertise and up-date their technical competence. Rotation of staff (General Services and Professional) from one post to another or between duty stations may be another method of career development. In order to move in this

direction in a fair and equitable manner, an evaluation of posts in the field should be performed periodically to ensure that they are properly classified.

13. There is an urgent need for the establishment of a career development path within the organization. Consequently, it is important for training to be linked to career development. In addition, we believe that the organization should establish training opportunities aimed at developing managers from within the organization, thereby, offering career paths to those staff that have committed themselves to the success of the organization. The organization and the staff would reap the benefits of a career development program. Further, training opportunities should be made known to staff through the most effective communication channels which may include the Internet, bulletins, orientation, job posting, etc. The Secretary-General of the United Nations, in his report to the General Assembly earlier this year, indicated his strong support for enhancing career prospects for General Service staff; recognition of the need to achieve gender balance among professionals at the senior levels; and recommending increasing resources for training of staff (Report to the General Assembly, Document A/57/387). In fact, the Secretary-General has stated that at least two percent of an organization's budget should be allocated for training.

Conclusion

14. The Staff Association acknowledges the natural progression that its relationship with management has taken towards a staff-management partnership which has resulted in very open and informative discussions. We continue to work together to achieve common goals which will benefit all. This has been made possible through direct discussions with the Director and the Human Resources Manager and as a result of the Joint Advisory Committee meetings, which we understand will continue.

15. We thank Dr. Roses and Mr. MacMillan for the opportunity of expressing our views and concerns during the past year. The Association looks forward with confidence to a positive and amicable future.