

156th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Provisional Agenda Item 6.4

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STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PAHO/WHO STAFF ASSOCIATION

1. The Staff Association would like to thank the Members of the Executive Committee for their attention and interest regarding issues related to current staff working conditions, in accordance with the provisions of the International Civil Service. On behalf of the personnel and staff, we reiterate our commitment to the mandates of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB or the Bureau).
 2. At this session of the Executive Committee, the Staff Association will address the main issues currently of interest to staff, namely: *a)* relations between the Association and Executive Management, *b)* the Bureau's human resources strategy, *c)* the PASB Management Information System (PMIS), *d)* World Health Organization (WHO) human resources reform, *e)* the Bureau's internal system for conflict resolution and the administration of justice, and *f)* comments on certain Executive Management initiatives.
 3. The working relationship between the Association and Executive Management can be considered cordial and one of mutual respect and cooperation. As in all complex institutions, the Bureau and, in particular, its Director, must engage in dialogue and manage technical cooperation actions, generate value added, and maintain a balance among the different strategic actors in the world of international work. Within this framework, the Staff Association's role is to advocate for staff members and personnel in general, with a view to maintaining a respectful work environment.
 4. The Staff Association's role is to weigh in on situations that give rise to disparities, conflicts, ad hoc interpretations of staff rules or processes, abuse of authority, and, in general, any situations that hinder the optimal overall performance of the Bureau. The Association works with the responsible internal entities, depending on the nature of the issue to be addressed, including: Human Resources Management, the Office of the Director of Administration, the pension and health insurance units, the Ethics Office, the Office of the Ombudsman, and the Office of the Director. Its working methods range
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from specific thematic meetings, to participation in joint committees, preparation of documents, surveys, and other methods.

5. Internally, the Association is structured as two principal forums, an executive committee and decentralized representative entities; in both cases, staff elect their representatives democratically and directly. Staff representatives work on a volunteer basis. One of the challenges we have been facing recently is promoting participation, so that staff will take on leadership roles. There are real constraints here, including: lack of time due to each staff member's heavy workload—especially in this transition period with the PMIS and the effective reduction of resources—, the entry of new personnel not familiar with the Association's function and practices, and limited understanding of the complex issues involved in the regional and global dialogue, which require special learning that not all staff members are willing to take on.

6. All of the foregoing is carried out through a process of dialogue that is crucial to building confidence and achieving transparency and integrity in all aspects of staff/management relations. This process is ongoing and, insofar as we are able, we extract lessons learned and good practices, contributing to the institutional memory of the Organization.

7. For this dialogue to be productive, the contributions made by the staff representatives to the Organization's institutional efforts should be accepted and recognized, and specific mention should be made of the value added in the framework of the joint staff/Administration working committees, including the selection committees, the Staff Health Insurance Surveillance Committee, the WHO Staff Pension Committee, which participates in the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board, and the WHO Global Staff/Management Council, among others. The openness demonstrated by this administration has helped to enrich dialogue and decision-making.

8. With regard to the Bureau's human resources strategy, we note with enthusiasm that the consultation process has been restructured. All staff will have the opportunity to respond to weekly surveys by Management, and three working groups have been set up, coordinated by the respective Directors of Executive Management aimed at addressing: workforce architecture, renewal of staff skills, and modernization of the country offices. The Association has representatives on each working group, and we hope to make our contributions, while ensuring that we engage in the necessary consultation processes. The Bureau clearly needs to have a human resources strategy that ensures: *a)* that its human resources are aligned with the Strategic Plan and organizational priorities; *b)* the performance and recognition of staff as part of a clear policy of accountability that motivates staff members to deliver to the best of their abilities; and *c)* the delivery of quality, timely, technical cooperation to the Member States and, in particular, to the national health authorities of our Region.

9. The PMIS project is of substantive importance for modernizing the Organization. It will include a review of certain administrative processes and several parallel information systems will be integrated. In this regard, the Staff Association would like to

recognize the entire PMIS project team for its commitment and attention to detail. We should also recognize all staff who, in order to implement the different stages of the PMIS in addition to their regular duties, have to participate in reviewing and describing PMIS functionalities, and validate whether or not they are suited to our conditions. During this stage, significant work has been done by personnel working in human resources, finance, and staff benefits.

10. We are all in a transition period in which some administrative tools continue to be processed with the old procedures, while other actions make use of the new PMIS functionalities. We know that, in all cases, the workload is heavier and staff are physically tired because the requirements have doubled, but we believe the Governing Bodies should be very satisfied that the PMIS is moving forward; our staff members have demonstrated outstanding commitment, and we hope that all those who have participated are openly recognized, both the project team and colleagues who have had to handle the double workload, and those who have taken on the job of promoting acceptance and change and have been responsible for training their colleagues in the new system.

11. The WHO human resources component, as part of the WHO reform process, has been widely discussed both in the forums of the Governing Bodies and in the dialogue between WHO Management and the staff associations through the WHO Global Staff/Management Council. One issue that requires special attention and that affects PAHO's governance is how mobility and rotation policies are structured. In principle, the Staff Association does not oppose rotation and mobility, which are part of the international civil service system. In the particular case of WHO—perhaps because there is a lack of understanding about the nature of PAHO and its governance—we would note that PAHO posts are not WHO posts, and vice versa. WHO staff who want a PAHO position should follow the same procedure as when PAHO staff wish to fill a WHO vacancy. This should be a competitive selection process. Candidates should meet at least the minimum requirements set forth in PAHO rules. What does this mean in practical terms? That P4 professionals or higher should meet the academic requirements, including master's degrees, language competency, and international competencies.

12. This would make the mobility process—aimed at absorbing WHO talent—much more transparent, legitimate, and consonant with PAHO governance. Moreover, PAHO staff expect the same level of reciprocity. When WHO staff join PAHO, they should complete their probationary period like any other new staff member, the same as PAHO staff do when they join WHO. We have presented all of this to the WHO authorities, to our regional counterparts and our counterparts in the staff associations, and to the PASB Executive Management. We need to have standardized minimum rules that apply all across WHO and PAHO.

13. PAHO, in turn, has its own rotation and mobility processes, mainly in the professional area of technical cooperation and international administrators of the country offices.

14. With regard to the administration of justice in the Bureau, the Staff Association welcomes the Director's explicit commitment to the "Respectful Workplace" initiative. This initiative began by impetus of all the WHO Staff Associations, and other than the Director-General of WHO, the only regional director who has explicitly endorsed it is Dr. Carissa Etienne. We feel that this initiative will contribute positively to individual and corporate responsibility to generate and maintain a work environment that promotes confidence among staff, with an emphasis on the prevention and early resolution of disputes before they escalate to higher, more formal levels.

15. Gradual progress on the respectful work environment initiative will facilitate the work of the Office of the Ombudsman and the Ethics Office.

16. We wish to commend the Board of Appeals for resolving the pending cases and, in the talks held with those responsible for this area, we have requested that the Chair of the Board give presentations to staff on the right of appeal, and the Board's procedures and modus operandi. Confidence in conflict resolution is largely built by personnel having access to information, when there is fair and due process, and when decisions are reached in a reasonable time. In addition, we wish to note that the Board could not do its work without the responsibilities voluntarily taken on by the Secretary and the members of the review panels.

17. With a view to maintaining focus on the progress made on the issue of administration of justice and conflict resolution, we will be attentive to output 6.2.3 of the Program and Budget 2014-2015, which calls for "improved ethical behavior, respect within the workplace, and due process across the Organization," and whose indicator describes the "level of staff satisfaction with the ethical climate and internal recourse procedures of the Organization."

18. In light of the comments made in response to certain Executive Management initiatives, we are convinced that PAHO would benefit substantially from a review of the services that make up the internal justice system, with a view to making its operation more effective and efficient, and reducing the risks for the Organization. To achieve this, it is necessary to close certain gaps that pose risks for the Organization in order to build confidence among staff and ensure them that they are working in an environment where conflicts are prevented and appropriately managed.

19. The Staff Association submits this report to the Executive Committee for comments and in order for the Committee to promote the proposals and recommendations contained herein.

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