

## 162nd SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Washington, D.C., USA, 18-22 June 2018

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*Provisional Agenda Item 6.3*

CE162/26  
1 June 2018  
Original: Spanish

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

1. The Staff Association thanks the members of the Executive Committee for the opportunity it has given us and for its interest in learning about the status of working conditions and relations between the staff and the administration.
  2. In introducing this document, we wish to reiterate the commitment of the staff and the Association to the vision, mission, and values of the Organization. We are always mindful that the values of equity, excellence, solidarity, respect, and integrity should guide our actions and inspire new generations to better understand why we work for an institution like the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).
  3. The Association is an internal agent dedicated to supporting and working together to create a workplace environment that fosters high individual and organizational performance aimed at achieving the impact sought by the Member States to improve public health in our Hemisphere.
  4. On this occasion, the Staff Association will be reporting to the Executive Committee on the following topics: *a)* relations between the Association and Executive Management; *b)* the importance of a working environment that promotes trust and creativity; and *c)* a responsive system of internal justice.
  5. The working relationship between the Association and Executive Management is characterized by cooperation, a search for consensus, and mutual respect. The reelection of our Director has raised expectations of significant progress with the PAHO technical cooperation agenda, and developments in the approach to human resources management and administration.
  6. The Staff Association is an internal agent for change. It takes advantage of every opportunity for dialogue with Executive Management and the administration in general to formulate proposals and advocate the implementation of policies that respond to the current situation of the staff who provide services within the Organization. From the report submitted to this Executive Committee on the subject of human resources management in
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the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB) (Document CE162/25), it is clear that a significant percentage of the people who work in PASB are not staff members but rather contingent personnel. This situation creates an imbalance in terms of the opportunity to be represented, and in the way managers assign and supervise daily work. While these contingent workers perform an important function in delivering the products and services we offer as an Organization, they also have significant weight in the configuration of the working environment in terms of levels of responsibility, duties, and equity.

7. If we are indeed guided by the values of the Organization, we believe that these values should be the pillars of human resource management and administration, and that they should permeate all levels of the Organization. We have noted with concern that the intentions and declarations expressed by the Director in this regard have not always been internalized by the various individuals responsible for implementing them. Effective communication and positive trends in the interactions between staff members and their respective offices have not been forthcoming with the necessary speed and quality.

8. In light of the above, we would link this issue directly to the importance of a workplace environment that promotes both trust and creativity. For some time now we have been conducting an active campaign to promote a respectful working environment. It is one of the initiatives in which the Association has invested the most effort and provided the most support. Ours is one of the few regions of the World Health Organization to have this campaign sponsored by the Office of the Ombudsman, which guarantees its institutionalization.

9. However, we must recognize that the campaign has not been as successful as we had hoped, possibly because we never set targets or measure progress, or because we failed to identify impact indicators; or perhaps, because the initiative did not become an institutional effort. We believe that we need to completely redefine the approach. With the effort that has gone into development and implementation of the PASB Management Information System (PMIS) in previous years, we now have access to tools that will provide us with integrated data. We now know where our work is focused, what individual features we have (both demographics and capacities), and, of course, information on performance and the link between individual and institutional functions.

10. According to our analysis, issues that appear to be isolated situations or concerns that have been addressed in a fragmented manner—for example, the performance evaluation process, staff motivation, the creation of opportunities for women in the workplace, comprehensive policies for staff succession, capacity building, the incorporation of new talent especially from within our Region, and improving the competitiveness of our internal candidates—should be part of a single package of human resources management. Human resources management is the everyday job of our managers, and they should be in a position to perform this institutional function using modern institutional methods to foster productivity. The tools for them to perform these functions should be designed and made available to them by the Department of Human

Resources Management, which in turn could monitor implementation and document good practices and lessons learned.

11. Staff members, in turn, have the responsibility to meet the required standards, participate actively, and follow the policies and regulations that form part of their daily work.

12. A workplace environment that fosters trust and creativity has the following characteristics: *a)* it creates space for recognition and feedback; *b)* it values different points of view, expressed without fear of discussion of ideas; *c)* it creates challenges with the goal to improve, not hinder; *d)* it communicates important information from the outset and avoids speculation; *e)* it avoids stereotypes because diversity is accepted; and *f)* it is concerned about the physical and mental health of all.

13. We believe that we have an excellent opportunity to rethink our approach and launch a program for changing the workplace culture in which each element that we have mentioned will contribute in a synchronized and articulated manner to the effort to improve the quality of the working environment. This process should be participatory and it should be driven by the managers, with clearly stated levels of responsibility and, especially, clear progress indicators for documenting good practices and lessons learned. Since work is set to begin on preparing the PAHO Strategic Plan, it will be important to also consider, within PASB, initiating a process leading to the preparation of a Strategic Plan for Human Resources.

14. With regard to the internal administration of justice, we wish to confirm our support for the decision to separate the function of workplace investigations from the Ethics Office. The PASB justice system already has an informal resolution procedure through the Office of the Ombudsman, which follows the International Ombudsman Association Standards of Practice. The Association is convinced that informal conflict resolution is a tool that contributes to improvement of the workplace environment. The agreement that was reached when the Office of the Ombudsman was created stipulates a maximum contract term of five years for the individual performing this function; given the nature of the work, we feel it is a sound idea to make the change every five years.

15. The second line of resolution within the internal justice system is formal resolution. In any given situation, the Organization has the authority to conduct workplace investigations. Once it is decided to conduct an investigation, it is expected to be done in a professional, timely, and congruent manner, such that the decision taken will be the result of due process.

16. As pointed out in the Association's report for 2016, it is necessary to clearly define the roles and functions of the Office of Ethics, the Office of Legal Counsel, and the Department of Human Resources Management at each stage of investigation process, starting with receipt of the complaint and including determination of what or who is to be

investigated, the scope of the investigation, preparation of the report, presentation of the findings, and the measures taken as a result of the investigation.

17. We are anticipating with interest the process for selecting the official PASB investigator and look forward to contributing to the review of the investigation protocol, which may resolve some of the concerns that have been mentioned.

18. In closing, we wish to reiterate our interest in, and support for, gender parity, especially in the creation of opportunities for women. As stated in the final reports of the sessions of the PAHO Executive Committee held in June 2016 and 2017, the Association is calling for a program backed by explicit policies and practices that will facilitate the promotion and creation of opportunities for women who work in the Organization. In our previous report we pointed out that a woman in the professional category takes five years longer than a man to be promoted in the workplace, and that situation has not changed.

19. It is important to emphasize the need for greater efforts to transcend the informal institutional culture that hinders the progress of women and to train managers to detect and avoid bias when identifying or selecting possible candidates for positions of managerial responsibility.

20. As we noted in the paragraphs above, this subject should be part of the program for cultural change. PASB is well positioned to create an institutional culture that achieves and maintains gender balance at all levels, promotes a healthy working environment for all staff, and takes specific steps to change attitudes and eliminate prejudices that perpetuate inequality between men and women.

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