

*executive committee of  
the directing council*



**PAN AMERICAN  
HEALTH  
ORGANIZATION**

*working party of  
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**STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE  
PAHO/WHO STAFF ASSOCIATION**

This is the PAHO/WHO Staff Association presentation to the Executive Committee of PAHO in connection with personnel and staff matters. The Association reiterates the importance for the Administration of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau to:

- follow through with the establishment of a Joint Staff/Management Committee;
- align its recruitment and retention practices with those of the United Nations Common System;
- review the totality of existing Administration/Staff committees to make them more responsive and meaningful to staff participation;
- undertake the formulation of a new policy on performance evaluation;
- assure that staff participating in any Staff Association committees or activities will not be discriminated against or harassed in any way, as well as guarantee the confidentiality of all correspondence and communications;
- relocate the Staff Association Office to the main building of the Washington Headquarters of PAHO.

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## 1. Introduction

The Staff Association, in its 1993 and 1994 reports, expressed serious concern that the Organization would have difficulty in continuing to furnish the high level of technical assistance upon which it had built its reputation. This concern was shared by technical staff and administrators located in field and headquarters duty stations. The basis of its concern was that during the past few years staff's terms and conditions of service had not remained competitive with the marketplace. This has been brought about by faulty methodological approaches to salary surveys for locally recruited staff on the part of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) and flawed or missing comparator studies to determine the best paid national civil service for salary levels of professional and higher categories of staff. The poor technical performance by the ICSC in these areas has compelled the Organization to attempt to overcome the problem of recruitment and retention of qualified staff through dubious hiring practices which have either flouted, or worse, in some cases, ignored the relevant United Nations rules and regulations. As a result, staff have been compelled, in order to protect themselves and their interests, to seek legal redress through the appeal procedure. The ILO Administrative Tribunal decisions, as Committee members know, have weighed heavily on the budget of the Organization.

As distasteful as it should be for the Organization to be compelled to defend illegal and unethical practices, it is equally so for staff who have no other choice but to defend themselves in such situations. Therefore, the Staff Association (and all colleagues) were pleasantly surprised by the words of the Organization's new Director at his meeting with staff on 1 February when he said, *inter alia*, that "staff should be active in the Staff Association because it is one mechanism for carrying out some collective thinking about the Organization as a whole." He continued, "My stance is, was, and will continue to be one of openness. I do not like adversarial positions." Further, he stated that he would "prefer not to seek solutions through adversarial posturing." He then touched on a theme which Staff Representatives have maintained for some time. There is little need for positions between staff and the Director that are diametrically opposed because, and here we add what we believe he was saying, "Together all of us are the Organization, together at different levels of responsibilities we all have a common interest, that is, working for the good of the Organization and its Member States."

Dr. Alleyne also reminded the staff that they are the human resources of this Organization, they are its wealth. Being its wealth, it must not be squandered or wasted. Rather, it requires prudent care and new investment in the form of special programs designed to help all staff but giving emphasis to certain high priority groups. Staff could not agree with him more, but they have heard this same statement in other fora mentioned usually for the consumption of the unwary and uninitiated. Staff want more

than just words: they want concrete programs and actions to give meaning to these statements. Staff expect their dignity to be respected and their merit recognized, and they require a sense of security in their jobs. Compensation must be fair and adequate and in equitable relation to the dictates of the Noblemaire<sup>1</sup> and Fleming<sup>2</sup> principles upon which compensation is based within the United Nations. Staff must feel free to make suggestions (and, where necessary, complaints) for the improvement of the Organization and themselves. Above all, there must be equal opportunity for development and advancement for those who qualify, based upon objective criteria agreed to between representatives of Staff and Management.

Staff are confident that Dr. Alleyne intends to fulfill his undertakings with them. Staff Representatives, on the other hand, pledge to identify those areas where changes and improvements are necessary in the interest of their constituents and the Organization, and to come forward with constructive suggestions utilizing the process of participation and effective two-way communication.

## 2. Staff Initiatives

There is no time like the present to start working together. The Staff Association requested a meeting with the Director, which took place on 24 April 1995. In that meeting, Staff Representatives outlined those issues which have for too long been overlooked, ignored, or simply not addressed. They requested the Director's favorable consideration of several staff initiatives, with the following outcome:

- He agreed to the creation of a Joint Staff/Management Committee as it exists in many other organizations within the United Nations Common System.
- He agreed to undertake, through the new Joint Staff/Management Committee, a review of all existing Staff/Administration/Management committees, working groups, and ad hoc committees for the purpose of making them responsive to the current needs of the Organization and staff, and to permit staff participation to be meaningful rather than perfunctory.

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<sup>1</sup> An agreement made in 1921 by the Noblemaire Commission of the League of Nations to base the salaries of staff in the Professional category of the League (later the UN system) on those of the best paid national civil service, which at present has been identified as that of the United States of America.

<sup>2</sup> The principle according to which the salaries of locally recruited staff are determined, initially promulgated in 1949 by the Committee of Experts on Salary, Allowances, and Leave Systems. Salaries and wages for locally engaged staff should be fixed and paid in local currency and should be sufficiently high to recruit and retain staff of high quality and standing.

- He recognized the need to relocate the offices of the Staff Association, if not to the main PAHO building due to space unavailability, at least close to it in the Columbia Plaza or the Annex Building, and he will investigate the space available.
- He did not agree to align the Organization's policy of administrative leave for elected Staff Representatives with that of other Common System agencies, but asserted that he will inform senior staff, at their next meeting, of the rights of the elected Staff Representatives to use, in agreement with their supervisors, the necessary time to perform their functions.

Staff trust that he will consider these requests and open meaningful discussions for the purpose of reaching a conclusion satisfactory to both the Organization and the Staff.

### **3. Recruitment and Retention of Staff**

In all organizations within the United Nations, more commonly referred to as the "Common System," the inability to recruit and retain highly qualified staff has become a major problem. Many organizations try to resolve this difficulty through offering higher grade levels to new entrants (which has become known as "grade creep"), while others revert to dubious practices of promises of post reclassification once the new staff member has been hired or, in many instances, to reclassify posts of serving staff members as inducements to remain with the organization. The Staff Association believes that such practices discriminate against staff who are not so favored, create distortions within the overall grading systems of the organization, and, more importantly, fail to address the problem at its roots. Competition within the marketplace for highly qualified people in today's economies, which continue to expand, is indeed very keen. The determining factor becomes the compensation and fringe benefit package offered. It is here that work must be done.

The Organization has attempted to identify a partial solution to its recruitment difficulties through the use of consultants who are former PAHO staff members. A short-term, ad hoc solution has become long-term and repeated. Some of these consultants have been working in consecutive assignments over a period of years with a break after 11 months. The Staff Association considers that neither the staff nor the Organization benefit from such a practice. Regular staff are being denied potential career opportunities that would be forthcoming if these ongoing work functions were formalized in definitive posts. The Organization loses because it is not preparing itself for the future by developing in-house expertise.

The Staff Association hopes to have the support of the Executive Committee in bringing an end to this practice. At the same time, it expects the Administration to utilize consultants as consultants, rather than as *ex officio* members of the PAHO Secretariat.

Furthermore, it does not believe that this misuse of consultants can be rationalized within the justification of organizational restructuring. In any restructuring exercise (within the UN context), the primary goal must be to make maximum and efficient use of available, in-house human resources.

At the same time, there will be instances where job growth and performance warrant post reclassification. When such situations arise, the Staff Association believes that the internal mechanism of Selection Committees and Post Reclassification Committees should be employed, but with more equitable representation and participation of staff representatives, which, in the latter, is not the case today.

#### 4. Relocation of Staff Association Offices

The present location of the Staff Association offices more than one-half mile from the working premises of the Organization is not satisfactory. The United Nations General Assembly has on many occasions stated the importance of staff representation, and this position has been supported by *res judicata* of both the United Nations' and the International Labor Organization's Administrative Tribunals. The Staff Association has been separated from its constituency—the staff of PAHO—for too many years now. Initially it was explained that the move was temporary pending renovation; recently the excuse is lack of adequate space.

The true explanation is that the previous Administration believed that the Staff Association served no useful purpose—or perhaps was too effective. By placing it in exile, its operational and functional importance could be controlled. Experience over the years has demonstrated that nothing could be further from the truth. Now that adequate space is available, the Staff Association urges that this matter be resolved in the shortest time possible. Given the encouraging words of the Director on the subject of staff representation and its work with and utility to staff, the Association trusts that next year it need not raise again this same subject with you.

It is germane to reiterate but one judicial statement from the ILO Administrative Tribunal on the issue of nonavailability of staff facilities:

The withdrawal of facilities could violate the right to associate if, irrespective of scale, it was designed to coerce the Association into acting in a way of which the Administration approved or to punish it for having acted in a way of which the Administration disapproved. This would strike at the freedom and independence which is an essential part of the right to associate. (ILO Judgment No. 496, page 17, Paragraph 20.)

## **5. Variations in Employment Contracts**

Over the past few years, the PAHO practice of offering different types of contracts to PAHO staff depending upon the location of employment has become ever more prevalent. When the Administration first initiated this practice, the Staff Association was told that such offers were exceptional and it was not the intention to regularize the procedure. Over the years, it has become clear that this information was misleading. The practice of offering special types of contracts has become the rule rather than the exception. In fact, the exception has become formalized and carries the title of "Local Contracts." The Staff Association finds this unacceptable, and, as in the past, wishes to draw to this practice to the attention of the Executive Committee with a view to having it terminated.

These local contracts given to local and national personnel fail to contain the same provisions of tenure, job security, pensions, and medical and accident insurance offered to other PAHO/WHO staff and staff within the UN Common System. Such practices create difficulties between staff and the administrations within the same organization. They reflect poorly on the Organization in that it is seen as not a serious employer, and creates rivalries and personal problems among staff themselves. Worse, such a practice fosters the development of two classes of PAHO staff—the haves and the have nots. The Staff Association maintains that no employer, least of all one within the United Nations, should resort to such dubious human resource hiring practices. It asks that this practice be terminated.

The Staff Association believes that within the present UN Common System adequate nondiscriminatory solutions are available so that all staff, regardless of point of hiring or employment, are treated equally.

## **6. Staff Development and Training**

As Member Governments are aware, PAHO has a training program for staff, but the Staff Association believes that it is not related to the present and future needs of the Organization. Nor—and this is extremely important—does it believe it has been established on the basis of requirements for skills not available within the Organization. The proof of this is in the distorted and abnormal hiring practices referred to above. The Staff Association remains firmly convinced that the highly motivated and technically competent staff available within the Organization can easily be "recycled" for other tasks with a training program addressed to achieve this end. Such a program can only strengthen the basic asset of the Organization—its staff—by offering them the opportunity for technical improvement and career advancement. Staff would like to discourage the existing administrative practice of returning to the "marketplace" each and every time a different skill is required instead of seeking and developing such expertise "at home."

The practice of this approach, improving the Organization's human resources from within, has proved itself in other organizations (in both the public and private sectors) to be cost efficient and more beneficial to all parties concerned. The Staff Association urges the Executive Committee to impress upon the PAHO Administration the need to move in this direction.

Staff members must be assured that the Organization wants to give them equal opportunity for development and advancement if they are qualified. If they are qualified for their present tasks, emphasis should be placed on making them equally so for other positions within the Organization.

As an integral part of staff development, there needs to be an impartial, modern (with meaningful involvement on the part of staff and supervisor) performance appraisal system. The Staff Association believes that performance evaluation is a continuous process which occurs over the entire year. As an essential element, it contains continuous communication between the staff member and supervisor in the form of performance feedback. It enables both persons to monitor the degree to which the agreed work program is being met, and it opens up to staff the possibility of having a more direct and ongoing work relationship with the supervisor. It also will do much to break down the reluctance barrier of certain supervisors to meet with their staff and discuss both achievements and areas for improvement. It moves the performance evaluation system from one of negativism to positive interaction. At the outset, the supervisor and staff meet to set performance expectations, and communicate continually on the attainment of the goals and, most importantly, on what the performance levels set mean to both parties.

## 7. Salaries and Pensions

With the conclusion of the corrected salary survey for local staff at headquarters and once these results are published and implemented, it can be said that in Washington the Fleming principle has been fairly well respected. Unfortunately, much work is still required for staff in field duty stations where the future is indeed bleak, given the new but flawed salary methodology recently adopted and implemented by the ICSC. This faulty methodology has led to significant reductions in salary levels at duty stations of the Common System where this methodology is used, and has in turn resulted in legal appeals being lodged by staff in Paris, Vienna, and Rome. Hopefully, corrections can be made to this methodology to avoid a new round of legal appeals; however, given the present political and nontechnical approach to such problems by the ICSC, staff aspirations may be misplaced. Only time will tell.

On the other hand, salaries of internationally recruited staff (Professionals) have not kept pace with the comparator (the U.S. Civil Service). The 1994 level of salaries



set by the ICSC (in the exercise referred to as "Report on the Margin") failed to include the benefits of the 1990 Federal Employee Pay Comparability Act (FEPCA) and, more importantly, this same Commission has refused to move forward to complete its United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)-mandated study of the Noblemaire principle to determine the best paid national civil service, which, according to studies undertaken and published by the Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA), no longer is the United States of America. In another part of the professional pay package, namely the post adjustment, serious flaws remain uncorrected even though the technical subcommittee (the Advisory Committee on Post Adjustment Questions) of the ICSC has on three occasions reported that adjustments are called for and long overdue. Here again, the ICSC in 1994 has been playing politics with a technical problem, because of the pending re-election of four of its members.

In 1994 the level of pensionable remuneration (which determines the level of pension) of locally recruited staff was reduced by about one-third. Neither FICSA nor the Staff Association believes that this reduction was warranted or timely, for the reason that neither the earlier reductions in 1991 nor the new level of salaries determined in 1994 had yet impacted upon the actual pensions. Concerning pensions for internationally recruited staff, a complete review of the existing methodology to determine the pensionable remuneration has been mandated by the UNGA, with a report from the United Nations Joint Staff Pension Board (JSPB) expected in late 1996.

#### **8. Status of Women in PAHO**

The Staff Association recognizes the Organization's continuing effort (with a certain amount of success) to correct the underrepresentation of women in professional positions in PAHO, with particular emphasis on the decision-making level, as well as in field assignments. This said, it again feels compelled to note the serious disparity in compensation between men and women in field assignments, because many women are locally instead of internationally recruited. Staff again voice their strong objection to the continuance of this policy.

On the other hand, the Staff Association takes this opportunity to congratulate the Administration on the introduction of a policy against sexual harassment. This policy will apply not only to women but equally to all staff, regardless of gender. Here again, staff are pleased with the Director's stated intention to formalize this policy in conjunction with Staff Representatives.

The Staff Association would also like to congratulate the Administration on the proposal to amend Staff Rule 410.3 concerning the employment of spouses. The staff has always favored such an amendment and encourages its acceptance.

## 9. Working Conditions

The Staff Association supports the FICSA initiative to obtain safe and secure working premises and conditions for all staff, whether at headquarters or field duty stations, in times of peace or when UN peace-keeping troops have been mustered. It regrets to note that, in a few PAHO duty stations, there are inadequate security arrangements and protection for staff, creating serious concern among its colleagues. It trusts that these problems will be discussed and proper solutions found with the least practical delay.

## 10. Joint Staff/Management Committee

As indicated in the beginning of this presentation, the Staff Association requested, and the Director agreed, to the formation of a Joint Staff/Management Committee similar to that which exists in the United Nations and other specialized agencies. The purpose of this committee is to enable the Director to establish and maintain continuous contact and communication with staff representatives in order to ensure their effective participation in identification, examination, and resolution of issues relating to staff welfare, including conditions of work, general conditions of life, and other matters of personnel policy. Such machinery is essential to any manager to assure that he is continuously advised on problems concerning staff, how proposed personnel policies will affect terms and conditions of employment, and staff welfare.

This Committee, of course, will be concerned with problems affecting staff, or problems which develop as a result of proposed new or existing rules and procedures. Its members would, after proper discussion and deliberation, advise the Director on ways and means of resolving the issues, improving proposed changes to rules within the framework of existing regulations so as to remove the parts which adversely impact on staff.

## 11. General Matters

This report would not be complete if the Staff Association failed to point out other general concerns, some of which are "hold-overs" from the past, others of which have evidenced themselves recently.

- Staff-originated correspondence (from the field and headquarters) with Association representatives continues to be opened by persons other than the indicated addressee. The Association finds this practice absolutely unacceptable—an invasion of privacy—and there is no justification for this procedure, apparently authorized in some duty stations, to continue. The fact that the PAHO official pouch may be the vehicle for despatch of such correspondence is no justification,

given the fact that similar types of correspondence in other Common System organizations are not subjected to the same treatment. Staff ask that instructions be given to terminate this practice immediately.

- Greater effort is required to assist staff in communicating with their elected representatives and, equally important, to assure that there is no interference of any type while a staff member is conducting staff affairs or performing duties as an elected official of the Staff Association. The Association further requests that improved support be given to staff functional activities (i.e., training programs on salary survey methodology) which are also in the interest of the Organization.
- The Staff Association hopes that past difficulties raised by the Administration resulting in barring properly elected Staff Representatives from participating in authorized staff activities (i.e., PAHO/Staff Association Council sessions, FICSA-organized training courses on salary surveys) will terminate.