



Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations on matters concerning personnel policy and conditions of service

For this session of the Executive Board, the eight staff associations of WHO staff present their views and concerns separately. Common problems include lack of transparency - especially in recruitment and selection, job insecurity, the appraisal system, different types and abuse of short-term contracts, appointments of limited duration, security of field staff, harassment and victimization, stagnant professional salaries, the employment of retirees, and the consultation process. The staff associations trust that efforts will be made by the Administration to address these issues without delay.

AFRICA

1. The Regional Office for Africa covers a large number of country offices and field programmes. Many of the offices of the WHO representatives have inadequate staff and poor resources. Better selection and appointment of WHO representatives and their staff, and of field staff, are needed, since current procedures do not always take into consideration the real needs of the countries of assignment. Staff in the African Region feel that much more could be done to improve the mobility of staff within the Region and within offices.

2. A major concern is the abuse of temporary contracts at all levels, including management. This is an area that needs urgent and thorough review.

3. The Regional Office has been moved to Harare pending the resolution of the local problems in the Congo. Staff have had to adapt to the situation of civil unrest and the uprooting of the Regional Office. Through no fault of theirs, many staff will lose their jobs. We ask the new host government for flexibility and understanding of the problems of staff recruited locally in Brazzaville to allow WHO to maintain as many such staff as possible in Harare.

THE AMERICAS

4. A more transparent personnel policy, especially as concerns recruitment and classification, is needed. Staff must be motivated and have improved access to career development. Guidelines for dealing with the growing problem of harassment are urgently needed.

5. The staff in the Region of the Americas would like to have access to an ombudsman to mediate and solve conflicts before they become major problems. Currently only headquarters, the European Region and IARC have access to an ombudsman.
6. The staff are concerned about the different types of contracts currently in use, so that often equal work is remunerated by different pay. There is confusion with regard to their post classification, salary procedures, and whether the staff rules apply. Regular recruitment seems to have been bypassed by budgetary constraints.
7. The implementation of the Project Performance Evaluation System, in particular its impact on post classification, is causing concern.
8. Attempts by the International Civil Service Commission to cut general service salaries, and thus pensions, by manipulating the methodology are unacceptable.
9. The PAHO/AMRO staff call on WHO to increase the scope of staff members covered by emergency measures within a country, and for wider dissemination of the relevant parts of the Security Handbook so that information on contingency plans is known to all.

SOUTH-EAST ASIA

10. Staff in the South-East Asia Region are greatly concerned about the effects of the proposed shift in resource allocations. Should these be carried through, WHO's programme in South-East Asia will be adversely affected. As a corollary, we fear that there will be staff reductions. In such a scenario, the cherished goal of health for all may not see the light of day, at least in this part of the globe, which comprises one-fourth of the world's population.
11. We are not against reforms, but are against sweeping changes which not only reduce the role of WHO in some regions but also deprive staff of their means of livelihood. Management has already unilaterally resolved to freeze certain posts, downgrade some senior general service posts and curtail five-year contracts to two years. This is depressing for the already demoralized staff.
12. The Association has repeatedly taken the stand that retired staff should not be re-employed; if it absolutely has to be done, it should be on a very selective basis.
13. We urge that the appeals process be reviewed and the rules modified so that (1) staff who are affected by decisions of the Regional Director can appeal to the Director-General directly, and (2) those affected by the Director-General's decision can go direct to the ILO Administrative Tribunal.

EUROPE

14. The Staff Association of the European Region strongly urges Member States to look into ways of ensuring that WHO staff members are permitted to maintain their civil and social rights in their countries of origin in the same way as European nationals working for the European Union and its agencies.
15. There are regular reports on instances of United Nations staff who have been kidnapped or even killed in the performance of their duties. The Staff Association maintains that there should be equal rights to evacuation for both internationally recruited and locally recruited staff in a state of emergency. We cannot accept that the lives of internationally recruited staff are worth more than those of locally recruited staff; they are all staff members. Although the staff of WHO have not, as yet, been seriously affected in areas where there has been civil unrest, we urge Member States to give due consideration to this issue.

16. Job insecurity, combined with increasing demands and unrealistic workloads, endless short-term contracts for temporary staff, some of whom have served the Organization for more years than some of the fixed-term staff, results in a lack of job satisfaction, and a feeling of not having a future. This state of affairs can only be detrimental to the work of WHO. We believe that the solution is rational planning, forward thinking and two-year time-limited contracts. The working conditions for short-term staff, who have very few entitlements, do not encourage loyalty, a characteristic of which we have always been so proud.

17. We are concerned about deteriorating working conditions and remuneration, for staff both in the professional and in general service categories. Professional staff salaries and allowances are no longer competitive. The changes in the salary survey methodology for local general service staff proposed by ICSC and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, have the sole purpose of holding back salaries so that they are no longer equivalent to the "best prevailing rates". Both the Noblemaire and Flemming Principles, the cornerstones of WHO's recruitment policy, are being disregarded.

EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

18. The principle of staff consultation should be applied in practice. Instances of flagrant disregard of staff input include the case of the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) which has for too long ignored staff points of view, leading to the present boycott of the Commission by FICSA. Another is the absence of staff input into the plan for relocation of the Regional Office from Alexandria to Cairo, affecting the lives and careers in particular of some 300 fixed-term and temporary general service staff. A decent modality for their relocation is vital for the Organization and its Member States to ensure that programme implementation continues to be efficiently processed. If this calibre of experienced staff is lost, a vital part of institutional memory, which cannot be easily compensated, will disappear.

19. The results of the interim survey of general service salaries conducted in the Regional Office in June/July 1997 still have not been processed, and thus the proposed increase in general service salaries is much delayed.

20. In the Regional Office, Staff Association work is undertaken on a voluntary basis. No time off is granted by management for staff work; there is no subsidy for staff activities, nor a decent room for the Staff Association to work without interruption or to consult confidentially with staff. Headquarters should indeed urge management to offer realistic time, subsidy and facilities to staff associations to permit good work. Above all, harassment of staff representatives should be condemned.

WESTERN PACIFIC

21. An issue affecting most Asian countries is the devastating Asian currency devaluations against the United States dollar. The financial situation in these countries, notably the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and India, remains extremely volatile. Much concern has been expressed about the adverse effects of the loss in purchasing power of the local currencies and its effect on general service staff salaries. The bigger problem actually lies on its disastrous effects on the pensions of general service staff in soft currency countries.

22. Special measures need to be found immediately to alleviate some of the negative impacts of the currency crises on local salaries. Countries in other regions, such as Africa, South-East Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean face similar problems.

23. Staff in the Western Pacific are concerned about the proposed resource allocations and hope that their implications will be thoroughly evaluated.

INTERNATIONAL AGENCY FOR RESEARCH ON CANCER

24. The introduction of limited, non-renewable contracts is causing considerable disquiet among the staff in Lyons, who consider that such contracts will be detrimental to the future of the Organization.

25. The human resources policy at IARC, as presented recently to their Governing Council, also produced a very strong reaction among the staff, as it implies that the staff are too old and less qualified than the young people who could be employed if the IARC staff did not stay on so long. In addition, it implies that in particular general service staff of a certain age no longer have the technical skills needed and thus are less productive. At the recent general meeting of the Staff Association, staff voted massively in favour of a protest resolution.

26. The staff at IARC are concerned about the new performance appraisal system. The proposed new form is unnecessarily complicated, and thus very difficult to complete properly. For many staff members, the form proposed will not allow assessment of the work actually carried out, in particular if this is different from the post description, which is often the case. The value of achievement reporting is questionable and the use which will be made of it is unclear. It is doubted whether the new form will allow proper evaluation of staff or improve the current appraisal system.

HEADQUARTERS

27. The staff at headquarters continue to be concerned at the number of high-level appointments with little or no transparent selection procedures, and continue to work for a more open and fair selection process. There is still lack of a policy for training and career development, although both of these areas are currently under review.

28. There are concerns about efforts to introduce performance-related pay, when there is clear evidence that most staff are against a merit recognition system based on monetary reward. Indeed, most companies who introduced performance pay in the 1980s have found, contrary to expectation, that performance pay is demotivating.

29. The large number of temporary staff is giving rise to concern, a situation reflected throughout the Organization. Extension of staff beyond the official age of retirement, as well as the recruitment of retired staff to carry out routine work, reflects the lack of a proper staffing plan and inadequate succession planning. Guidelines for re-employment of retired staff are urgently required.

CONCLUSIONS

30. The staff associations are proud to represent the staff of WHO. At this time of regeneration, the values on which WHO's reputation and leadership role are based are being renewed for the twenty-first century. We look forward to new management and pledge our support to the new Director-General for the work that has to be done to revitalize world health.

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