

## **Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations**

Mr Chairman, honourable members of the Executive Board, distinguished delegates and colleagues,

1. The WHO, UNAIDS and IARC staff associations are pleased to have the opportunity to present to the Executive Board the staff's point of view on a number of major issues that have a direct impact on staff. We appreciate that this statement, and future statements on behalf of the staff associations, will be made available to the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee, which reviews staff policies, and provides guidance and makes recommendations to the members of the Executive Board on those policies.
2. We would like to follow up on some of the concerns that we shared in our statement to the Executive Board in May 2016, with respect to staff-management relations, including the need to promote a respectful workplace; the WHO Health Emergencies Programme and its workforce; and the WHO's internal justice system.
3. With a view to streamlining procedures and practices, we would like to suggest that all regional staff associations should be allowed to address Member States through the regional committees, as is already the case at the Regional Office for the Americas and the Regional Office for Europe. This would promote uniformity in approach and dialogue between staff associations and Member States. Your support for this suggestion would be very much appreciated.
4. We recall that interaction between elected WHO staff representatives and Member States at the Executive Board is a long-standing practice, endorsed through resolution EB57.R8 of 1976. We thank you for your feedback that our statements provide pertinent information to you on how reforms have affected the Organization's way of working and the consequences for its staff.

### **STAFF-MANAGEMENT RELATIONS**

5. Generally, staff-management relations remain constructive and mutually beneficial throughout the Organization. At headquarters, there may be more frequent opportunities for exchanges with the administration than is experienced in the regions. Nevertheless, in the regions, each staff association has regular meetings with its respective administration.
6. Collectively, representatives of the administration and the staff associations of each major office meet each year in the Global Staff Management Council, to discuss staff policies and topics of relevance. They also meet throughout the year, through teleconferences, in preparation for the annual Council meeting. The joint staff-management recommendations of the Council are submitted to the Director-General for approval. We would like to express our concern about the fact that the

recommendations, which are then submitted to the Global Policy Group for endorsement, can be set aside without explanation, with little regard being given to the extensive preparatory work done by the administration and the staff associations.

## **HIGHLIGHTS AND SUCCESSES**

7. WHO lags behind other international organizations in respect of gender equality, especially for positions at the P5 level and above. In 2015, the headquarters Staff Association set up a joint staff-management think-tank on gender equity to develop a strategy to contribute to the achievement of the gender targets of the United Nations System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women. The think-tank developed 18 recommendations on what WHO needs to do in order to meet the gender targets. An Organization-wide implementation advisory group has been established to implement the recommendations at all levels before the end of 2017.

8. The Respectful Workplace Initiative is another joint staff-management effort, which receives support at all levels of the Organization. It is advancing in the creation of a corporate organizational environment in which everyone feels respected and safe at work and in which the importance of work-life balance is recognized. A closely related issue that needs further attention is teleworking, which is commonly practiced in other international organizations and which inter alia can protect the health and safety of staff in country and regional offices. We highly recommend that arrangements allowing for this modern way of working be put in place across the Organization by the current administration or at least by the next one.

9. Lastly, we fully support the decision taken by United Nations General Assembly in resolution 70/244 (2015) to extend the mandatory age of separation to 65 for serving staff. We therefore respectfully request the administration to implement this binding resolution by 1 January 2018 without any delays.

## **WHO HEALTH EMERGENCIES PROGRAMME AND ITS WORKFORCE**

10. Although Member States commendably approved a budget envelope of US\$ 485 million for the new WHO Health Emergencies Programme in May 2016, the funds required to fully staff this Programme have not materialized. Instead, funding is being redirected from the planned activities of other programmes, especially at the regional level, in order to meet the deadlines for establishing the WHO Health Emergencies Programme. This situation puts at risk not only WHO's ability to respond effectively to emergencies, but also its ability to implement planned activities due to the redirection of funds. Therefore, the WHO staff associations urge Member States to fully fund the new WHO Health Emergencies Programme and its core staffing to give WHO a real chance to reform itself and to meet the international community's expectations with respect to leading emergency responses.

## **INTERNAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

11. At the start of 2016, the Executive Board approved the amendments to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules concerning the establishment of a Global Board of Appeal and the introduction of an administrative review process, completion of which is a prerequisite for filing an appeal to the Global Board of Appeal. We take this opportunity to solicit your support to ensure the independence of the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Global Board of Appeal, and to ensure that a review of the internal justice system is carried out after the first year of implementation and a proper evaluation is carried out after two years, in order to allow for any corrective measures. Furthermore, we call for the recruitment of dedicated and fully independent ombudspersons at the regional level to strengthen informal

resolution processes, and a legal adviser for the staff association offices to reinforce the Organization's preventive system, in line with the major recommendations of the external consultants who reviewed WHO's internal justice system in October 2014. We appreciate the administration's openness to discuss how best the implementation of these recommendations can be financed.

12. Efforts are being made to put a more speedy and effective mechanism in place to address cases of psychological harassment. It is important to recall that psychological harassment requires different methodologies of investigation than those required in cases of sexual harassment, physical assault or fraud. Your support for these efforts, which are in line with the Organization's zero tolerance for harassment policy, would be welcomed.

13. A mediation policy that includes a large majority of our suggestions has been in effect since 1 November 2016. We hope that it will help to address staff conflicts in the early stages. Discussions with the administration are ongoing with respect to the need for global monitoring and effective and timely action in respect of conflict "hot spots". A concerted effort by all relevant stakeholders is needed in order to achieve better prevention and avoid conflict escalation.

## **REQUESTS TO THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

14. Mr Chairman, honourable members of the Executive Board, distinguished delegates and colleagues, in summary, we respectfully request the members of the Executive Board to:

- fully support the suggestion to give regional staff associations the opportunity to address their respective regional committees, or enable the regional committees to have a more focused discussion with the regional staff associations on staff issues affecting their particular region;
- request the Global Policy Group to explain to staff in writing the reasons for setting aside any joint staff-management recommendation agreed upon at the meeting of the Global Staff Management Council in October 2016;
- request the administration to implement the extension of the mandatory age of separation to 65 for serving staff by 1 January 2018, as requested in United Nations General Assembly resolution 70/244 (2015), without any delays;
- fully fund the new WHO Health Emergencies Programme and its core staffing in order to avoid the redirection of WHO funds allocated to other activities;
- support a robust internal justice system with a fully independent Chair and Deputy Chair of the Global Board of Appeal, dedicated and fully independent ombudspersons at the regional level and a legal adviser for staff association offices, as well as a review of the first year and a proper evaluation of the second year of implementation; and
- support appropriate harassment investigation methodologies and processes in line with the Organization's zero tolerance for harassment policy.

15. Please rest assured that we, the staff associations, are fully committed to continuing the constructive dialogue with the administration to safeguard staff members' rights and well-being, and through that, to contribute actively to achieving the Organization's mission.

16. We thank you once more for this opportunity.

= = =