

Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations

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

1. WHO is in the midst of a transformation. A transformation to bolster the impact and influence of the Organization's aims and values within the global health agenda. A transformation to engage politically with all nations because health is, indeed, a political choice.
2. As we focus our attention outwards to monitor and improve the health of our nations and our communities, so must we also look inwards and take stock of the internal temperature of our staff. During one of his first speeches as Director-General to his new workforce, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said: "unless we are internally healthy, we cannot fulfil what we want to achieve as an Organization. We simply can't".
3. The collective staff associations of WHO, UNAIDS and IARC, representing over 9000 staff members globally, are happy to hear this sentiment from the new administration. Effective leadership, especially within an organization as large and as vast as ours, recognizes challenges and tackles them head-on. True leaders communicate vision with clarity while embracing an organization's mission and values: these elements must be knit together, creating a cohesive purpose.
4. The internal health of our Organization has been poor these past years. While performing our utmost to deliver on the needs and challenges of global health, results of which we can be collectively proud, our internal community was being weakened through an unprecedented number of changes to staff rules.
5. For any community to thrive, it must be healthy and safe. Safety inside an organization means a workplace where staff are free from the fear of job loss due to ineffective resource mobilization or erratic restructuring. Safety means a workplace where staff are free from bullying and harassment, or the fear of harassment, in all its ugly forms, and when such behaviour makes itself apparent, staff know the Organization will root it out before it festers. Safety means staff worldwide are confident that they have access to health care facilities and affordable medicines for themselves and their families while striving to achieve better health for the population at large. Safety allows staff to concentrate on the job to which we are committed – bettering health for all.
6. Engagement can only exist when staff are safe. Staff engagement is the foundation on which WHO will build to achieve its goals. To be engaged, staff must be inspired and recognized for the work they do. They must feel part of a single community and identify with its values. To be fully connected requires strong internal communication structures that impart and inform and share inwards in order to mobilize the forces outwards. When staff are inspired, they inspire others. It is infectious. Moods lift, vision is shared and ambitions are elevated.

7. The staff associations are encouraged by the new Director-General's leadership of his workforce. We are optimistic by his determination to listen purposefully to staff, his desire to fully comprehend the WHO internal culture he has inherited, and his encouragement of staff to bring new ideas forward.
8. In this spirit, and as the Director-General, the new administration and our governing bodies discuss boldly WHO's transformation, we – the staff that serve its mission – present a series of bold ideas for consideration.
9. Create more core P1 and P2 positions. End the over-reliance on junior professional officers, consultants and interns for so-called entry-level work in the international professional category.
10. Develop clear career pathways for colleagues working in the general service category. This should include routes of progression from general service to international professional or national professional officer. This would open up the opportunities for development and growth in staff's contributions to WHO.
11. Pay interns and fellows a stipend, so that WHO can attract a diverse and highly qualified group of young professionals from around the world, particularly from low-income countries. Demonstrate to the world that WHO supports international labour standards. Access to internship should be based on merit, not on ability to pay.
12. Modernize parental leave: four months for all staff members who become parents, plus an additional two months for the staff member who gives birth to the child. This would be a bold contribution to the United Nations Secretary-General's gender equality agenda and would inspire others.
13. Rapidly establish a global network of health care facilities that recognize WHO staff health insurance, offering preferred prices for health services and direct-billing arrangements. Reinforce quality and solidarity by ending the two-tier policy that exists for staff in some countries, a policy that currently creates unfair, discriminatory financial burdens simply because of the duty station location or health status of the staff member.
14. Invest in a staff health and well-being programme and campaign, designed to respond to the findings of the staff health risk survey, with a strong focus on mental health and supporting colleagues serving in difficult field environments.
15. Promote mobility as mutually beneficial for staff and the Organization. There should be a focus on professional growth, family-friendly environments, and ensuring the framework advances gender equality and women's leadership across offices.
16. Create more short-term exchange and growth opportunities through filling posts during parental leave and sick leave with current WHO staff (i.e. "backfilling"), fostering cohesion across WHO and broadening the skills and perspectives of staff. Fund all backfilling and exchanges through a central mechanism thus streamlining implementation.
17. Communicate internally more effectively, maintaining a positive dialogue, sharing successes and experiences, influencing and inspiring others. Build a global network of internal communication experts throughout all major offices. Remove the antiquation of our current internal communications

system and invest in robust tools, including a globally connected intranet network, knowledge management hubs and collaboration software.

18. Building on the successful internal justice reform, demand more accountability from the Organization for those who work in its care. Serve the vulnerable. Enable the Organization to live up to its values by taking swift and specific action against those who choose to undermine it through the bullying and harassment of others. This should be done while removing the full burden of responsibility from those most directly affected: those who are at their weakest.

19. The staff of WHO affirm their commitment to a WHO transformation that is inspired, a transformation that recognizes its workforce as the central hub from which organizational successes are aspired to and achieved, a transformation that demonstrates respect for WHO staff, and a transformation that has a cohesive vision to which we all – staff and Member States alike – can align ourselves to and rally behind.

20. Inspired leaders think, act and communicate from the inside out. They engage with staff and encourage their teams to engage with each other. To repeat, and simply put, staff engagement is the foundation on which WHO will build to achieve its goals.

21. Inspiration is infectious. Inspiration leads to fulfilment and the desire to go that little bit further, work that little bit harder, and dream that little bit higher.

22. With the new WHO transformation, let us be inspirational.

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