
Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations

Mr (Madame) Chairperson, honourable members of the Executive Board, distinguished delegates and colleagues,

1. The staff associations of the World Health Organization, PAHO, UNAIDS, and IARC represent over 9000 staff members globally. We welcome the opportunity to engage with Member States today and to share with you staff views on recent organizational developments and priorities. We advocate for stronger support to staff. We look forward to collaborating with you on an enabling work environment for high performance and impact.
2. This said, our address this time around covers staff–management relations, staff working conditions, geographical mobility, and common United Nations system-wide issues.

Staff–Management relations

3. We welcome Dr Tedros' open-door policy and his conscious decision to engage elected staff representatives as soon as he assumed office. He continues to engage us at every given opportunity. These decisions and practices set the tone from the top, with a cascading and positive effect of making managers at all levels more accessible to their staff. We also welcome the Director-General's commitment to staff by ensuring that he and members of senior management meet on a monthly basis with staff representatives at headquarters to reach common views on problem solving wherever possible. While in some cases we may agree to disagree on issues, the dialogue is healthy. We commend senior management's willingness to engage with staff representatives.
4. We are grateful for Member States' interest in the Ombudsperson's report at the last session of the Executive Board in January 2018. The report raises several systemic issues that hamper staff in developing their full potential and maximizing their professional impact for the countries we serve around the world. We want to acknowledge the Director-General's openness and sense of urgency to address these issues, as well as those arising from the results of the Organizational Culture Survey conducted in the last quarter of 2017. The administration has shared survey results with staff and is actively soliciting our views. We see this as a positive step, creating an ambiance that emboldens staff to express themselves without fear or rancour. We want this to be a lasting feature of our organizational culture, on a consistent basis and at all levels of management, that organizational issues are addressed for the common good, and to positively impact the countries where we serve. As staff representatives, we commit to partnering with the administration to come up with policies and other solutions that improve collaboration and trust, and remove systemic bottlenecks, thereby resulting in an organizational culture that is invigorated and inspired to achieve higher productivity across all levels of WHO.

Staff working conditions

5. With regard to staff working conditions, we recognize the Organization's commitment to following-up on recommendations made at the 16th Global Staff/Management Council in October 2017, and for which drafts of revised policies on Harassment and Sexual Harassment, Staff Development and Learning and Recruitment of Retirees have been shared with staff representatives for our input. Draft policies on "Return to work"¹ and on "Gender parity and diversity" in the workforce have also been shared for our input.

Harassment and sexual harassment

6. We appreciate the administration's commitment to take staff inputs and concerns on board in relation to these policies but see the need to reiterate our expectations in this regard. We are concerned that staff continue to perceive that harassment, harassment claims and abuse of authority continue to remain a challenge within the Organization, often with detrimental and significant consequences on the health, careers and welfare of the individuals affected. WHO staff representatives participate actively in Federation of International Civil Servants' Associations (FICSA) meetings, and during the 71st FICSA Council in Bonn in February 2018, we were proud to work together to develop a resolution outlining staff expectations for the prevention of all forms of harassment and abuse of authority in the United Nations. We welcome the United Nations Secretary-General's establishment of a task force in order to step up efforts to tackle harassment and boost support for all those who have experienced harassment of any kind. At the time of writing this statement, we are working with the administration to improve the draft revised WHO Policy on Prevention of Harassment and Sexual Harassment. Our input is guided by the principles expressed in the resolution adopted by FICSA, which include:

- WHO's duty to establish rules and provide clear guidance on how unacceptable behaviours will be addressed, taking into account best practice;
- the need for information campaigns to educate staff and other personnel on their rights in the workplace, and the means whereby they can secure access to support services (e.g. Ombudsman; staff counsellor; legal, human resources and ethics advisers), and formal complaint and internal justice mechanisms;
- the need to review and strengthen their accessibility, and the availability of legal support;
- the need for independent, adequately resourced offices of internal oversight, so that allegations of harassment are investigated promptly and in accordance with due process and confidentiality standards;
- the need to reinforce a culture of accountability across the United Nations system; and
- the need to regularly review actions and monitor progress toward the objective of zero harassment in the workplace.

¹ This policy sets out procedures for ensuring the reintegration of staff after a significant break from service due to ill health.

7. An inclusive, respectful and supportive workplace environment is essential for the effective performance of WHO's functions and delivery of its mandate. We hope to be in a position to provide you with an update in our verbal statement at the time of the present session of the Executive Board. If our comments are fully taken on board, we are confident that the revised WHO Policy on the Prevention of Harassment and Sexual Harassment, and improvements to related mechanisms and procedures, could be held up as an example of best practice within the United Nations System and beyond.

Respectful Workplace initiative

8. On the Respectful Workplace Initiative,¹ we applaud senior management for the importance given to this initiative thus far, and the continuing interest to work with staff to delineate and clarify the scope of the activities to be implemented, monitored and evaluated. The staff associations commit to working with the administration, and in particular the Transformation Team, to further define a set of common values, behaviours and mindset shifts that can promote respect and cultural change in our workplace.

Staff development and learning

9. We revisit the recommendations on staff development and learning we made to the Director-General in the last Global Staff/Management Council report. These included the implementation of the short-term developmental assignments policy as a means to enhancing staff career development and geographical mobility in the Organization, the development of a budget plan, and a scaling up of the Staff Development and Learning fund. Subsequent meetings with representatives of senior management indicate that these recommendations are under consideration and we appreciate Member States' support in this. We are a knowledge-based organization and therefore appropriate investment in this area is essential.

Gender parity and diversity policy

10. With regard to the gender parity and diversity policy, we will work closely with our Director-General to ensure that it is implemented at all levels of the Organization for all employment categories in a consistent, fair and transparent manner.

Recognition of WHO Staff Health Insurance

11. We have reported previously to the Executive Board on our concerns regarding WHO Staff Health Insurance services. In particular, we have emphasized the serious risks related to the lack of local recognition of WHO's Staff Health Insurance, and the urgent need to reinforce the global network of facilities that recognize Staff Health Insurance and offer negotiated prices for health services. Staff, retirees and dependants need to be assured that, when they present themselves at a medical facility seeking care, especially in a personal health emergency, the health facility will admit them upon presenting their WHO Staff Health Insurance card, without requiring an up-front, out-of-pocket cash guarantee. While there has been a steady and growing effort to try to remedy this situation, recognition remains limited. At the last count, there are only 25 countries with health facilities that have signed agreements with the WHO SHI. We are pleased to report that, this June,

¹ Consists of management representatives and staff members at the three levels of the Organization.

there will be a dedicated agenda item on improving local recognition as part of the meeting of the Global Oversight Committee of the WHO Staff Health Insurance.¹

12. We look forward to reporting back to you on the outcome of these deliberations. We remain hopeful that there will be a swift and durable solution to this ongoing concern for so many of our staff.

Global geographical mobility

13. The new administration has announced that WHO is in its last year of voluntary mobility. The voluntary phase is intended to allow both management and staff to reconcile differences in our understanding of how this policy plays out at all three organizational levels.² We note that the rolling out of this policy is of great concern to many staff, but we are confident that fair, humane, non-disruptive and sustainable solutions will be sought and found, resulting in a win-win situation for staff and for the Organization.

United Nations system-wide issues

14. On United Nations system-wide issues, we would like to draw your attention to another worrying development for staff regarding the devaluation of local currencies in an increasing number of duty stations. This has had a disastrous impact on not only the salaries of serving staff, but also on the pension for retirees in the affected duty stations. We will continue to work closely with our staff federation to identify ways to improve the mechanism to address the negative impact of high inflation and currency devaluations on salaries and pensions. In the shorter-term, we would like to appeal to Executive Board members to consider a win-win solution for staff, administration and Member States by paying staff the actual budgeted amount of staff salaries in United States dollars. This amount would then be converted into the local currency at the time of payment from the Organization to the staff member. Such a solution would address the legitimate concerns regarding hyperinflation and devaluation that arise in some duty stations, and would ensure greater predictability and stability of staff real income.

International Civil Service Commission

15. We also wish to express the loss of confidence in the independence and technical competency of the International Civil Service Commission, following a series of major failings. These include the substantial deterioration in the working conditions of United Nations staff around the world, caused by the Commission's findings and decisions, such as: (i) negative changes to compensation packages equivalent to the loss of up to one month's salary for affected staff; (ii) pay cuts in the face of the rising cost of living at a number of duty stations and peacekeeping missions; (iii) unrealistic reclassification of hardship in the most challenging operational environments; (iv) lack of protection

¹ The Global Oversight Committee advises the Director-General on Staff Health Insurance management and operations. In particular, it reviews the operations and the financial status of the Staff Health Insurance programme; reviews the actuarial reports and recommends to the Director-General any required changes; reviews the implementation of the recommendations from internal and external audit reports referred to it on the accounts of the SHI; reviews and ensures the adequacy of the WHO Secretariat's direction and management of the SHI and reviews its performance annually; submits an annual report on the operations, administration and accounts of the SHI to the Director-General and all staff committees and makes an executive summary accessible to all participants; and proposes amendments to the Staff Health Insurance Rules for decision by the Director-General.

² The policy does not apply to the WHO Region of the Americas.

against inflation and currency devaluation; and (v) an unwillingness to provide the same danger pay to locally-recruited staff as to international staff. We are of the view that this is the result of the Commission's outdated governance model and working methods. Of particular concern is its lack of transparency and accountability. The Commission does not allow systematic access to data and there is no mechanism to review or appeal against its findings.

16. We therefore seek your support for urgent reform of the International Civil Service Commission and restoration of its transparency and credibility. To this end, we recall that the statutes of the Commission derive from a draft submitted to the United Nations General Assembly in 1974 by your predecessors, through the precursor of the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination, the Administrative Committee on Coordination. The reform we seek should include an urgent review of the Commission's governance structure, regulations and rules with a view to creating an accountable body that follows a transparent, balanced and fair process and methods.

17. While this review is ongoing, the staff associations call on you to take the following intermediate steps:

- permit WHO to temporarily withhold financial contributions to the International Civil Service Commission; and
- permit WHO to defer implementation of all decisions made by the Commission since 2016 relating to pay surveys. More specifically, uphold the recommendations of the United Nations Human Resources Network made in relation to the 2016 cost-of-living survey.

18. We also call on you to defer the implementation of proposed pay cuts while identified errors remain uncorrected, and not to implement secondary and tertiary pay scales, starting with staff in Bangkok and Tokyo.

Thank you.

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