

Statement by the representative of the WHO Staff Associations

1. The staff associations of WHO, UNAIDS and IARC are pleased to make this statement to the Executive Board on behalf of over 9000 staff members. This report highlights staff perspectives on the WHO transformation agenda and the proposed amendments to the ILO Administrative Tribunal statutes and policies on harassment and sexual exploitation. It also touches on four other issues that have an impact on the ability of staff to deliver on our shared mandate: flexible working arrangements, a respectful workplace, teleworking and geographical mobility. A verbal statement to the Executive Board will be delivered during its 145th session to complement this report.

2. We, the staff associations, acknowledge senior management's continuing effort to address staffing gaps related to diversity and gender parity. We also recognize efforts to propose draft policies and principles that address career development and management, such as initiatives to recognize excellence, amend requirements in vacancy notices to accommodate a broader spectrum of staff in the competitive process for higher grades and relocate staff who have served in hardship or remote duty stations.

TRANSFORMATION

3. On 7 March 2019, the Director-General together with all the Regional Directors announced to staff the new WHO headquarters organigram, which will also serve as a basis for the alignment of the structures of all major offices. We want to recognize the teamwork at top management as they came together to deliver the vision for the Organization's new ways of working to deliver the triple billion goals as spelled out in the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023. Staff also appreciate the commitment the Director-General made that there will be no job losses due to the transformation of the Organization in the immediate future.

4. Timely and transparent communication is essential to prevent undue stress among staff. At present, communication around how the transformation is likely to affect staff has been at best selective and tardy.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO ILO AT STATUTES

5. This year marks the seventieth year that WHO has been under the jurisdiction of the ILO Administrative Tribunal. Amendments to the Statute of the Administrative Tribunal, including provisions that would ensure that organizations withdrawing provide reasons for withdrawing and information on prior consultation with staff representatives, were submitted to the 335th Session of the ILO Governing Council.

6. The ILO Governing Council did not reach agreement on the amendments as proposed and has postponed the agenda item until its next session in the fall of 2019. We thank Dr Tedros for his support.

HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

7. Representatives of all WHO staff associations, including IARC and UNAIDS, have repeatedly articulated staff concerns regarding the proposed WHO policy on harassment, abuse of power and sexual exploitation. We have also sought the input of technical units, specifically colleagues working on gender-based violence within the Department of Reproductive Health and Research. The latest Global Staff/Management Council meeting held in October 2018 provided recommendations for amendments and changes to staff rules and regulations related to this topic.

8. Our comments and requests to management have included the following:

- do away with the presumption that informal resolution is a mandatory first step in addressing harassment in the workplace;
- align WHO internal policies with the evidence-based recommendations that it makes for the rest of the world;
- improve the version of the policy submitted to the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination Task Force on addressing sexual harassment within the United Nations System, established by the Secretary-General, with inputs from the WHO Office of Compliance and Ethics as agreed at the Global Staff/Management Council;
- provide clarity on the circumstances in which management, witnesses and other affected parties may trigger an investigation, including situations in which the directly affected party does not want to initiate or otherwise pursue the formal process;
- set deadlines for completion of the investigation process and the work of the Global Advisory Committee on Harassment Complaints and provide a commitment to tracking these and other “key performance indicators” for these mechanisms, thereby promoting more timely outcomes while upholding quality and due process;
- apart from Director-General, Regional Directors and Director, Human Resources, remove other decision-makers in cases of sexual harassment from the chain of command due to internal and external perception that these parties will not be able to remain neutral;
- make procedures for cases of harassment clearly distinguishable within the policy document from procedures for cases of sexual harassment.

9. During the regular meetings with the Director-General in the first quarter of 2018, we acknowledged efforts made by the administration and the Department of Human Resources Management to accommodate some of our requests, but also shared openly our expectation that WHO should take a lead in addressing harassment in a holistic manner.

10. We were also informed that, given how many stories about sexual harassment emerged from some United Nations agencies in the first half of 2018, the Secretary General of the United Nations had asked the United Nations System Chief Executive Board for Coordination Task Force, comprising representatives from all United Nations agencies, including WHO, to come up with a model policy as a

minimum standard for all United Nations agencies. Based on this direction from the United Nations Secretary-General, an agreement was reached at the Director-General level between WHO staff associations and management to suspend discussions on WHO-specific policy/policies on harassment and sexual harassment until the release by the task force of the “model policy” on sexual harassment. We also came to know that a United Nations survey on sexual harassment would be conducted. The major concerns for staff safety and well-being and security of the data have been addressed and the sexual harassment survey is ongoing. We are pleased to see that results have been recently shared with staff.

11. WHO staff associations also urged management at the Global Staff/Management Council not to wait for the outcome of the survey to tackle a draft revised policy on workplace harassment, as this type of harassment is more prevalent and experienced by a significant number of staff. They also urge the management to continue consulting the staff from the relevant technical units (namely, the Department of Reproductive Health and Research) throughout the updating of the WHO policy on sexual harassment.

12. The staff associations’ position on the next steps regarding harassment policy is the following:

- the draft policy on workplace harassment will be complementary to the WHO-specific revised policy on sexual harassment;
- as the leading health agency, WHO should set a very high standard among the policy/policies against workplace and sexual harassment;
- we object to the sending of policies to all staff by management as this allows management to pick and choose provisions that may be skewed in their favour and detrimental to staff. Meaningful consultation should be held with duly elected staff representatives, with input from technical colleagues.

RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE AND INTERNAL JUSTICE

13. The Respectful Workplace Initiative is a sub-item under one of the five streams of transformation and is handled totally differently in each major office. The intra-office culture traditionally differs in all regions and with increased mobility the role of proper human resources management, not just human resources administration, increases.

14. The headquarters Staff Association and WHO’s administration, working closely together with the full support of the Director-General and senior management, consider that activities organized under the umbrella of the Joint Staff/Management Respectful Workplace Initiative are key components of the implementation of the transformation agenda. In particular, staff and management across the Organization are working together to carry out practical ways to ensure that the values charter becomes not only a key document of the Organization but a part of its every day working life. The office of the Ombudsman has been an integral part of the Respectful Workplace Initiative and has been an important force since its inception.

15. People management in a fair, positive and unbiased manner is among the most essential functions in professional management and leadership. To ensure the achievement of good staff management, avoiding, inter alia, abuse of power, favouritism, personal prejudice, harassment, unfair and unjust treatment and other poor people management practices, as well as to address any breaches of fair, equal

and honest staff treatment, an independent, well-functioning and transparent internal justice system is essential.

16. While greater clarity about the role of the different services involved in the WHO internal justice system is necessary, greater choices for staff may be beneficial since different colleagues may prefer different avenues to address a particular issue. Since colleagues confronted with any issues of concern can choose to consult with informal services such as those provided through informal discussions between managers and staff, the staff psychologist, the staff counsellor, Staff Health and Wellbeing Services, Human Resources, the office of Ombudsman and the staff associations, it is necessary that adequate coordination exists among those services and that colleagues are properly informed about these choices and the differences among them. Recently, after the transformation announcement, we have seen the Global Transformation Team bringing together the different groups or offices that staff may consult in order to discuss together how best to respond to the concerns from staff post transformation. We would like this initiative to continue even after the transformation is over as this is a good way of connecting the dots and could be an efficient way of providing timely responses to the concerns of staff and helping to remedy situations before they become worse.

17. Overall, the majority of the elements of the internal justice system are remedial, as observed by the external panel of experts tasked with its review by the Director-General.

18. In order to follow up the issues raised and to pave the way for improving the internal justice system, the following steps are proposed:

- an Organization-wide Coordinating and Response Committee to be developed that has the mandate to analyse and support implementation through monitoring Organization-wide recommendations agreed-upon by the Director-General and the Regional Directors;
- the Evaluation Unit to regularly evaluate the newly implemented and existing elements, formal and informal, of the Internal Justice System;
- ensure reporting by the Ombudsman to the Director-General on trends in conflict issues, identifying units, departments and clusters in which conflict is high, while maintaining confidentiality;
- continue to provide to the Executive Board and its Programme, Budget and Administration Committee an Ombudsman report, highlighting general trends;
- include managerial issues and conflict resolution in the audit of WHO entities by the Internal Auditor.

FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGMENTS

19. Recognizing WHO management's drive to align WHO's practices with those in the rest of the United Nations (as exemplified by recent changes to the duty travel policy, the rationale for implementing the pay cut, plans for revising the harassment policy), the Staff Committee insists that WHO management adopt a comprehensive teleworking policy as recommended by the Global Staff/Management Council in 2017 that is in line with the Flexible Working Arrangements policy of the United Nations Office at Geneva (document IC/Geneva/2003/28, dated 30 May 2003). This policy¹

¹ See <https://hr.un.org/page/flexible-working-arrangements> (accessed 10 April 2019).

should replace the current “occasional teleworking” policy to include provisions for working from an alternative work site, for up to two days per week, provided that appropriate arrangements have been made and work outputs and means of communication are agreed upon. The Staff Committee and other United Nations agencies recognize that flexible working arrangements are part of a modern working place and an important tool to increase productivity and better balance the professional and personal life needs of personnel.

MOBILITY

20. Mobility has been presented as a major strand of the transformation agenda that could – if implemented well and wisely – help the Organization to nurture and retain a modern workforce that delivers on its mandate. We agree with the Director-General that we belong to the world and we need to serve where our knowledge, skills and expertise are most needed. However, how concretely mobility rolls out in 2019 and beyond will be a test of how the Organization empowers its employees – or does not. It is, however, important to acknowledge that mobility is already taking place and staff have been increasingly moving within and among the regions and headquarters.

21. The 2018 staff survey revealed that colleagues across levels and regions are in general supportive of mobility, as long as it is combined with taking into account staff’s personal and family circumstances and providing opportunities for professional growth. Staff told us they knew very little about the upcoming mandatory mobility, felt excluded from the information flow and did not understand what mobility would mean for them. They expect that the principles guiding mandatory mobility will be ethical and that its implementation will be transparent and fair.

22. It is commendable that management and staff representatives agreed on the principles and prerequisites to guide mobility (at the October 2018 Global Staff/Management Council). However, there is still a long way to go from general principles to specific actions. Information vacuums and secretiveness are detrimental and they have reigned for far too long. We are still waiting to see the administration’s road map and implementation plan, as well as operational mechanisms and criteria to be applied when mandatory mobility will come into force for a first cohort of staff later in 2019.

23. The summative evaluation report of the WHO Geographical Mobility Policy during its voluntary phase, released in January 2019,¹ spells out requirements to be fulfilled in order to optimize the chances of a seamless, effective and equitable implementation of geographical mobility in WHO. Many of the Report’s findings coincide with staff concerns. In particular, geographical mobility should not be a mechanical rotation exercise obliging people to move for the sake of moving or forcing them to choose between their families and their careers. It should be a strategic instrument to enrich careers and skills, strengthen duty stations’ capacity to deliver and contribute to the fulfilment of WHO’s mandate. A well-designed, gradual, respectful and evidence-based geographical mobility should be a win-win situation in order to jointly satisfy the legitimate expectations of WHO’s Member States, managers and staff.

24. We agree with the evaluators that a culture of geographical mobility needs to be developed only progressively and should be encouraged with success stories about the integration of geographical mobility into performance appraisal criteria and career development schemes.

¹ Available at <https://www.who.int/about/what-we-do/evaluation/corporate-evaluations/thematic-evaluations> (accessed 10 April, 2019).

25. Our concerns also stem from the challenge for WHO regarding the profile of its workforce of International Professionals. Staff networks of experts belonging to specific areas of expertise/job categories and working at different levels of the Organization should play a key role in decisions on mobility roll-out.

26. One fact is clear: the policy designed several years ago must be adjusted to reflect the new framework for delivering the Thirteenth General Programme of Work and to account for the organizational changes accompanying transformation. Aligning mobility with this new framework must happen in close consultation between staff and management, in order to:

- embed geographical mobility into a coherent staffing strategy that supports WHO's overall corporate strategy while protecting and nurturing staff;
- offer staff a package of career advancement, management, talent and knowledge management, succession planning and performance management incentives;
- customize WHO's framework for International Professional jobs, with a unified and coherent system of job titles and position descriptions, grades and career paths, including expert posts unique to certain locations;
- agree on measures to facilitate moves, settlement in the new living environments and induction;
- guarantee full transparency and fairness in selecting who should go, when and where;
- ensure that the policy is global and includes all WHO offices.

27. Being honest and open about how mobility will be implemented is critical for the reputation of our Organization. Staff will follow and participate only if they trust the Organization will take into account their interests and rights, empowering them for successful career growth, in the context of mobility with a human face.

28. We, the staff associations, would like to thank the members of the Executive Board for taking an interest in the welfare of the staff of WHO and related entities so that staff can continue to give their best and move the Organization to greater heights.

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