



# WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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

### INTRODUCTION

1. The staff associations of WHO, IARC and the Onchocerciasis Control Programme value the opportunity of submitting this statement to the Executive Board to report on developments since their last presentation at the 104th session of the Board in May 1999, and to convey to the Board the experiences and perspectives of staff from the workplace. The statement naturally focuses on human resource issues and matters relating to the conditions of service of staff, which ultimately affect the performance of the Organization as a whole.

### THE REFORM PROCESS

2. WHO staff recognizes that change is necessary to bring the Organization in line with what is happening in the world at large, and welcomes being part of positive reforms. However, the staff associations recommend that changes be allowed a realistic setting-in period to be tried and tested, fine-tuned and proven to work before being applied across the Organization. It must also be stressed that the reform process should aim, *inter alia*, at equity for staff, as well as at promoting performance and strengthening ethics. The participation of staff associations is essential to achieve this goal of bringing fairness and justice to the system. Without renouncing regional differences, there should be a standard idea of equity and justice that is common to the whole of WHO. Within this context, the staff fully supports the call of the Director-General for asserting the oneness of WHO, particularly through standardizing practices throughout the entire Organization, on the basis of "best practices".

### THE CONSULTATIVE PROCESS

3. Since taking office, the Director-General has given enhanced attention to consultation with all WHO staff associations and has maximized their input in her agenda of reform. Mechanisms such as teleconferences, videoconferences and above all the Global Staff/Management Council (GSMC) have rendered such consultation a continuing process and a solid reality. The bright example provided by WHO at Geneva in establishing staff/management cooperation based on mutual respect should be a standard for all regional offices. Unfortunately, however, in some WHO offices, staff/management consultation still leaves a lot to be desired. As stated in *A progress report on a hundred days of change*, there is a need for greater transparency and staff participation. In fact, there is a need to enforce, across the Organization, the new management spirit in keeping with the requirements of a changing world. The staff associations, particularly in the regions, still lack adequate facilities and

time for their activities. Therefore, we respectfully suggest a minimum allocation of 50% officially recognized time for staff association presidents to fulfil their responsibilities both at Geneva and in other WHO offices. Strict measures should also be taken to protect staff representatives against all types of intimidation so that they can fulfil their mandates and even their career objectives.

## **THE GLOBAL STAFF/MANAGEMENT COUNCIL**

4. The second meeting of GSMC took place in Geneva in June 1999. In addition to reviewing developments since the first meeting of October 1998, GSMC discussed many issues, including: human resource management reform; contractual reform; recruitment procedures; harassment/mobbing; staff rotation and mobility; performance management; work/life issues; senior executive service; health promotion; security of field staff; the relocation of the Regional Offices for the Eastern Mediterranean and for Africa; time and facilities for staff representatives; improving the consultative process in the regions; and the participation of the regional staff associations in the selection panels and in classification and reclassification review committees.

## **TASK FORCE ON HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT REFORM**

5. During the GSMC meeting, much discussion focused on identifying elements of a sound human resource strategy. Almost four months ago, the Director-General established at Geneva a Task Force on Human Resource Management Reform, with the active participation of staff representatives, to maximize staff performance at all levels of the Organization, through promoting staff productivity, efficiency and job satisfaction. The approach used focuses on strengthening incentives and removing disincentives, in order to bring components of human resource management up to the "best practices" in the United Nations system. This would enable the Organization to get the best out of its staff, would fit into WHO's strategic vision, and would reflect the core organizational values repeatedly stated by the Director-General. The staff looks forward to the practical outcome of this exercise and hopes to see it reflected in tangible reforms across the Organization.

## **STAFF ROTATION AND MOBILITY**

6. This issue has been discussed in GSMC and staff representatives have expressed full support for it, provided that the acquired rights of staff would be fully respected. The opportunity to move back and forth between country offices, regional offices and headquarters should be broadly made available to all WHO staff. This exposure would enrich the Organization with a versatile workforce equipped with a thorough understanding of the field of operations. The staff notes with expectation that this is among the issues being dealt with by the Task Force on Human Resource Management Reform.

## **COMMITTEE ON CONTRACT REFORM**

7. Following consultations at GSMC, the Director-General established the Committee on Contract Reform (CCR), with the participation of staff/management members from WHO at Geneva, the Regional Office for Europe and the Regional Office for the Americas. The Committee examined all types of staff contracts, in the light of related legal, financial and human resource issues, and submitted recommendations for developing a fairer and more rational framework for employment in WHO. A working group has been set up to study these recommendations and the draft report of the

Committee will be circulated within WHO as part of the consultative process. Comments will be incorporated into the final report, which will then be submitted as a Cabinet Paper for decision. It is hoped that the work of this Committee will enable WHO finally to address the gnawing problem of staff who have been serving under temporary contracts for long years, and thereby deprived of job security and of many of the benefits enjoyed by their colleagues who perform the same duties but hold fixed-term contracts. This widespread injustice is suffered roughly by one-third of the global WHO workforce, including 40% of staff in Geneva and the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, over 60% in the Regional Office for the Americas, and 58% in the Regional Office for Europe. The staff believes that the reform of the WHO contract system should enhance loyalty and job security. The staff is very much disappointed with the management decision to discontinue five-year and career-service contracts, and limiting contracts of all fixed-term/regular staff to two years. In this connection it is strongly recommended that the management reconsiders its decision and that all fixed-term/regular staff should be given a five-year contract automatically after four years of satisfactory service, as an entitlement to staff and not at the discretion of the administration. Job descriptions and post classification elements and the consequent staff benefits and entitlements should also be standardized across the Organization following "best practices" in the United Nations system.

## **RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES AND JOB CLASSIFICATIONS**

8. GSMC discussed current recruitment and selection procedures and the experience of implementing transitional procedures in WHO at Geneva based on "best practices". A videoconference on this issue was held on 9 December 1999, in which staff/management representatives from all WHO offices participated. A review is being currently undertaken in order to reform these procedures. In fact, it is in the best interests of WHO to ensure that only the best candidates are recruited and to prevent inefficient favourites from creeping in through the back door of the Organization. Experiences from various WHO offices point to the need for more transparency and active staff participation. The preparation of unified and strictly binding guidelines on recruitment and selection for the Organization as a whole is urgently needed, to ensure adherence to the text and spirit of the rules. Reform in this area should involve the development of measures for serious planning for succession, early and wide circulation of vacancy notices, proper review of candidature documents, the holding of well-prepared interviews and tests to select the best possible candidates and the short-listing of a minimum of three candidates per post, with a preference for already serving staff. The practice of staff representation on the post classification and reclassification committees, as happens in Geneva, should be standard for all regions. The criteria for job classifications also need to be standardized across the Organization to ensure equity and the application of the principle of equal pay for equal work.

## **WORKING GROUP ON HARASSMENT/MOBING**

9. In GSMC, it was agreed that a standard policy needed to be implemented to counteract the increasing number of cases of harassment in the workplace, including abuse of authority and psychological abuse known as mobbing. Under harassment, various types of abusive behaviour can be identified. These include the targeting of careers through unjustified abolition of posts (particularly of staff representatives), denying staff the necessary working tools so as to sabotage their performance, arbitrary requests for work outside working hours without compensation, isolation, blackmail, threats and intimidation. Pressures such as these consume staff energy, undermine performance and lead to demoralization. In addition, they are detrimental to the personal dignity, as well as physical and mental health, of staff and can have a shattering effect on personal and family life. In WHO at Geneva, a

Working Group on Harassment has been set up to produce a policy statement on this issue for the Organization as a whole. The Director-General is aware of the magnitude of this problem and has emphasized that harassment/mobbing will not be tolerated in WHO. The staff fully supports the efforts of the Director-General to rid the Organization of such behaviour and create a healthy working environment, free of all types of offensive behaviour, where staff members are treated with dignity and respect and, hence, able to focus on their work and give their very best to the Organization.

## **APPLICATION OF UNITED NATIONS COMMON SYSTEM**

10. In 1998, the United Nations General Assembly endorsed a decision granting the staff of the common system 10 days official holiday per year, instead of nine. While most other United Nations agencies abided by this decision, WHO has not yet implemented this “right” and has maintained the number of official holidays at nine per year. This situation has given rise to logistic and other problems where WHO shared premises with other United Nations agencies, particularly outside Geneva. The staff feels that the implementation of the decision to grant a tenth day of holiday would promote an equitable approach and would be in keeping with the WHO Constitution which stipulates in Article 36 that the “conditions of service of the staff of the Organization shall conform as far as possible with those of other United Nations organizations”, as well as the United Nations Common System Rules that govern all other aspects of service such as salaries and benefits, code of conduct, etc. The United Nations in general has also not implemented the ILO declaration of universal workers’ rights. The staff would like to see the United Nations practising what it preaches.

## **SECURITY OF UNITED NATIONS STAFF**

11. The issue of security, particularly of field staff, has been repeatedly brought to the attention of Member States, and the tragic incidents of staff who have been kidnapped or killed in the performance of their duties are well known. When danger hits, it hits all, irrespective of staff category. Therefore, it is essential that both internationally and locally recruited staff should be entitled to evacuation and to equal protection in a state of emergency. According to the *United Nations Field Security Handbook*, which sets out the organization’s security policy and the practical measures to be taken by the agencies during a security crisis, the rules and measures that apply to staff are not identical for internationally recruited and locally recruited staff. We feel strongly that this is discriminatory and violates Article 7 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that: “All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. ...”. Another equally important aspect of the security issue is to ensure the availability of the funds and logistics needed for the efficient implementation of security measures. Without these, security plans become useless. Mission reports of the Federation of International Civil Servants’ Associations indicate the seriousness of this issue and emphasize the urgency of providing the logistics necessary to rendering security plans feasible.

## **RELOCATION OF THE REGIONAL OFFICES FOR THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN AND FOR AFRICA**

12. The relocation of two WHO regional offices, those for the Eastern Mediterranean and Africa, had led to severe negative consequences on staff careers and had seriously disrupted the lives of staff and their families. Those who suffered most were the long-serving temporary staff who constituted almost one-third of the local workforce. This category of staff suffered gross injustice, as current rules

and regulations granted them no rights or guarantees whatsoever. After their long years of service, they found themselves jobless and deprived of any decent compensation proportionate to the effort and service they had given to WHO. This illustrative instance is a living proof that the contracts of long-term temporary staff must be regularized without delay to give proper security to their holders. Meanwhile, the least that could be done would be to make a real commitment to reappointing those temporaries who want to relocate with their offices, and to give them priority in recruitment on the basis of equity. This would, on the one hand, minimize the loss to WHO of the institutional memory represented by such staff, which cannot be compensated for in the short term, and, on the other hand, illustrate that the United Nations system observes ethics and practises the justice it preaches.

### **ADHERENCE TO RETIREMENT AGE AND THE REHIRING OF RETIREES**

13. While expressing deep appreciation to our colleagues who have served WHO for long years, the staff associations request that a fair opportunity be given to the new generation with up-to-date knowledge, vigour and talents to guide WHO into the new millennium. In this connection, the staff associations fully support the decision of the Director-General on adherence to the age of retirement and the directives pertaining to the rehiring of retirees. We also take this opportunity to warn against the practice, in some regions, of ignoring or manipulating the rules to perpetuate the employment of certain retirees for long periods in executive authority, or to confer on some individuals a series of temporary contracts after retirement, which sometimes lack clear terms of reference or duplicate the responsibilities shouldered by already serving staff. Needless to say, failing to detect such cases and take corrective measures would be injurious to the Organization, its budget and its human resource development policy.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF BEST PRACTICES IN THE TREATMENT OF WHO STAFF**

14. The issue of applying best practices equally in all WHO offices has attracted serious discussions in GSMC. Currently, the best practices are mainly applied at WHO in Geneva and the Regional Office for Europe, and to varying degrees in other regions. The staff views this uneven application as detracting from the unity and cohesiveness of the Organization. More dangerously, it is felt to be discriminatory.

15. WHO staff, hence, calls upon the Board to endorse the Director-General's call for one WHO and to support the uniform implementation of the staff rules, of procedures and of consistent approaches in the treatment of staff and staff representatives throughout the entire Organization, irrespective of staff duty stations, colour, race or culture. In fact, the inconsistency in the application of procedures in various offices and regions of the Organization is a serious offence to the unity and international character of WHO. A cooperative staff/management approach would make for a stronger, more cohesive and more effective WHO that can really set out to "make a difference" in international health.

16. In conclusion, the staff associations reiterate the strong loyalty of staff to WHO, their deep commitment to its high principles and their pride to belong to it.

17. The staff associations would appreciate your guidance on and favourable consideration of the points raised. The presentation reflects fully the perception of all staff and our suggestions for the way forward. Thank you for your attention.