



# WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

**EXECUTIVE BOARD**  
**109th Session**  
**Agenda item 6.2**

**EB109/INF.DOC./1**  
**17 January 2002**

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

Madam Chairman, honourable members of the Executive Board, Director-General, Regional Directors, colleagues,

1. On behalf of the staff associations of WHO, IARC and the Onchocerciasis Control Programme in West Africa I have pleasure to submit this statement to the Executive Board. We appreciate the unique juxtaposition of the staff associations with the administrations at both global and regional level, giving us enough opportunities for consultations/dialogues, facilitating problem-solving and mutual well-being. We also appreciate the mechanisms such as Global Staff/Management Council and staff/management consultative committees at regional level. It is only right that these things culminate in the opportunity, which the Associations deeply appreciate, of delivering the statement of the staff associations at this session of the Executive Board.

2. The year has seen many unfolding developments with regard to WHO and its staff members. The recent global challenges in terms of diseases, disasters and biochemical attacks brought the Organization's technical ability to the fore in assisting Member States to respond effectively. WHO's strength has, as always, been its human resources with their quality and effectiveness. Even in the face of their own personal security and safety, staff members have served unswervingly in upholding the Organization's mission and delivering its mandate. However, human resources would be as good or as bad as they are managed. They needed to be nurtured in order to retain and/or upgrade their enthusiasm and technical skills. Transparency and recognition in dealing with their service matters are, therefore, very important.

3. We would like to bring you up to date on matters concerning personnel policy and conditions of service, and to note the progress accomplished since the last session of the Executive Board. We also wish to inform you of the concerns which remain and are a great handicap to carrying out the tasks expected from us.

### **HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT**

4. The reform of human resources management initiated in the Organization at the behest of its governing bodies has now taken a decisive turn towards implementation. We note the work of the Task Force on Human Resource Management Reform, and also the deliberations and inputs of the Global Staff/Management Council in its successive meetings. There has been much progress on contract-related issues, rotation and mobility issues, and the rewards/recognition regime. We also are satisfied to note the progress made by the working group on rewards/recognition and its recommendations, which we hope will be accepted and implemented soon.

### **Staff/management relations**

5. The Global Staff/Management Council is an important body that allows a dialogue between staff and administrations. However, in order to improve its way of functioning, the documents that are to be discussed should be given well in advance (at least two weeks) to the staff representatives, so that they can consult in a satisfactory manner with the staff at large before the meetings.

### **Training**

6. It is through relevant training that staff should be able to maintain their efficiency to continually meet the changing mandates and challenges of the Organization. Progress has been made, however a lot is still to be done, in particular in the regions. Emphasis should be laid on occupational training at mid-career level through external and internal training or through mobility schemes. We request that enough funds be allocated in the budget for this, and that proper plans are formulated to implement training and career development plans in regional offices for staff members in all categories.

### **Re-hiring of retirees**

7. Professional excellence, experience and competency are to be put at premium. At the same time, the staff associations call for eschewing re-employment or rehiring of retirees. This practice smacks of nepotism and blocks the career advancement and punctures the staff morale, killing their enthusiasm, effectiveness and motivation. This issue has been brought to the attention of this august body several times. We request that the principle of “nobody is indispensable” should be honestly applied.

### **Career opportunities for professional and general service staff**

8. The staff associations, even at the cost of repetition, earnestly call for fair and equal treatment with equity for general service staff at all levels. We should not forget the fact that they are the prime movers, whether at headquarters duty stations or country/field offices and deserve better. In this respect, there is a felt need to have a dispassionate look into the discrimination among professional and general service staff, in order to lift the debilitating geographical criteria and waive these up to P.1/P.2 levels. Again at the cost of repetition, the staff associations call for introduction of a cadre similar to national professional officer, in the regional offices, enhancing the functional abilities of the regional offices and providing much-needed career development opportunities to the general service staff.

9. While professional salaries should be brought up to retain the best talent, there should be enough and relevant career development opportunities. In this regard, the regional administrations should be given authority to classify or reclassify posts up to P.5 level, in order to be more responsive to the staff needs and their career development.

### **Staff safety and security**

10. The burning issue of security and safety, particularly of field staff, has been repeatedly brought to the fore. The recent incident of brutal killing of WHO Representative in Burundi should be an eye-opener for us all. We appreciate the creation of a post of Director, Security Coordination in Geneva. However, we insist that security measures implemented in the field be applied to all WHO staff independently of their types of contracts and recruitment. All United Nations staff, whether international or locally recruited, should be treated equally in times of emergency and danger.

11. Also of paramount importance to country and field staff is the issue of medical and evacuation facilities. In cases of emergency medical conditions, there should be an easy and responsive mechanism of approval of medical evacuation. In addition, the question of having a global staff health insurance card should be looked into, so that production of this card should ensure easy and quick access to hospital treatment.

## **HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT REFORM**

12. The staff associations have noted the progress made so far on reform of human resources management.<sup>1</sup> We are pleased to see that the Organization is looking into issues of a staff ethics framework, workforce planning, and management accountability. Those are seriously neglected areas that have needed consideration for a long time. The document reflects agreements and promises made by the administration at the Global Staff/Management Council meeting in October 2001, in terms of contractual reform and human resources management. However, there are still certain significant issues which deeply concern us and deserve your attention as they are linked to modifications in staff rules which you will be considering.

### **Contract reform**

13. The two major guiding principles of the reform process of the past four years are simplification of the types of contract and an end to the practice of employing staff over long periods on “temporary contracts”. The administration is currently proposing a two-track four-tier system, with a new type of contract known as term-limited. It is our understanding that this type of contract should apply only to the newcomers and not to the current long-term short-term staff. We believe that formal selection procedures should be put in place, thus avoiding inequities among staff. We propose that the mechanisms of those selections be included in the agenda of the next meeting of the Global Staff/Management Council in March 2002.

14. In disagreement with the above, the headquarters and PAHO staff associations believe that this new type of term-limited contract will perpetuate inequities and complexities which they have worked so hard to remove. In the same way as before, a significant portion of staff will be recruited without proper selection, without compliance with policy on gender and geographical distribution and for periods of four years on contracts with very different benefits to staff recruited on fixed-term contracts. This goes against the fundamental principle to which they are deeply attached: equal pay for equal work. They trust that the management will adhere to this principle and provide equal opportunities among staff.

### **Abolition of reduction in force procedure**

15. The proposals on separation arrangements will allow abolition of any posts without prior discussion or consultation. We are aware that the competition phase of the reduction in force as currently practised is not satisfactory. The staff associations’ main concern is to ensure a process that affords protection to staff at all levels, according to their skills, competence and experience. However, we note that the rules of the reduction in force are an acquired right for each individual staff, and the staff associations have expressed their concern about its abolition. We request a commitment from the management to safeguard acquired rights of staff and suggest that suitable mechanisms be established.

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<sup>1</sup> See document EB109/25.

16. In view of the above and in order to dispel any misapprehension and to arrive at a broader consensus, the staff associations strongly urge that the issues of abolition of reduction in force, acquired rights and term-limited appointments as proposed in document EB109/25 be revisited in an exclusive meeting between administration and the staff associations before the staff rules are changed.

### **Employment of “long-term short-term” staff**

17. Negotiations are ongoing and they are moving in the right direction. It is urgent and important to propose decent contracts to staff who have served WHO for many years on temporary contracts. In November 1998, the Director-General, declared in a cluster note distributed to all staff that the problem of long-term short-term staff was a priority.

18. Therefore, in light of the proposals agreed at the meeting of the Global Staff/Management Council in October 2001, we urge all administrations globally and regionally immediately to start the work on solving this crucial problem.

### **Post management**

19. The staff associations note that the issue of post management is not well described in document EB109/25 and therefore strongly urge further discussions, at global and local levels, between staff and management.

20. Madam Chairman, members of the Executive Board, you will be playing a key role in the process when the Secretariat asks you to approve the measures it wishes to implement. We earnestly request you to consider the facts presented to you very carefully in the light of the declaration we have just made. We have great confidence in your wisdom and judgment for the best interest of the Organization.

21. The staff associations value very much the need for nurturing the consultative framework between staff and management, with honesty and transparency in staff management. It is only by being transparent that mutual trust can be developed on both sides. This would not only uphold the principle of workers’ participation in management, but also importantly, the much-needed sense of belonging. We fully believe in the principle of negotiation and consultation, to which we are deeply attached, and we note with satisfaction the efforts made in this direction over the last few years. The staff associations, at the same time, assure that they will contribute towards and promote the enhancement of work culture, accountability and mutual trust and reaffirm our commitment to strengthen the hands of our leadership in delivering the Organization’s mandate and mission of alleviating human suffering and providing better health to all.

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