



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations

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

1. On behalf of the staff associations of WHO and IARC I have pleasure to submit this statement to the Executive Board. We are living in a world of continual change, resulting from both natural phenomena and human behaviour. Many of these changes present a direct challenge to WHO in relation to the Organization's role and mandate. The irony is that in the face of the increasing challenges and complexity of tasks to which the Organization is required to respond, the resources at its disposal to address these challenges are getting smaller. This has a significant impact upon the people on whom the Organization depends to fulfil its mandate in the world. It is in these trying times that WHO needs dedicated people to carry out its mission despite the circumstances. WHO's staff is made up of highly committed men and women, both technical and support staff, who are willing, wherever they are posted, to meet the challenges and do the job even to the point of risking their lives. It is on behalf of these dedicated men and women that I speak to you today.

2. The previous year has seen breakthroughs and the implementation of measures to address some of the issues that we have brought to your attention many times before. We note with appreciation the creation of **Security Coordination** at headquarters to improve staff security and safety, which demonstrates to us that the Organization is acknowledging the importance of ensuring the security of its staff, especially in the field. Security awareness training has started to improve security coordination both in the field and in the various duty stations. Although this is just a start and a lot still has to be done, especially concerning our staff in the field, the provision made for security coordination was a big step. We are looking forward to seeing concrete measures taken to improve the situation of our colleagues in the field, especially those in the danger zone.

3. **Human resources management.** The reform of human resources management is now being implemented. We urge the management to honour its responsibilities to staff. In this respect, a number of issues need to be addressed, which we should like to reiterate here: integration of the rewards and recognition scheme, professional salaries, career development, training, hiring of retirees, the performance management and development system, the competency project and conflict management.

4. An integral part of the reform of human resources management is a rewards and recognition scheme. We await with enthusiasm action by management on the recommendations made by the working group on rewards/recognition that it has established to deal with this issue. Although the Organization has done much to improve human resources, there must be an adequate means to recognize competencies and contributions.

5. We also note with appreciation the recommendation of the International Civil Service Commission to restore the overall level of the margin between the United Nations/United States net remuneration scales to 115. We consider the matter of professional salaries to be of high priority and we welcome the inclusion of the pay and benefits review in the agenda of the Commission's next meeting.

6. **Career development for professional and general service staff.** An organization is as good as its people. WHO should not only be able to attract the best individuals but should be able to retain them. Individuals whose motivation is to serve the community beyond personal gains. In order to achieve this aim, there is an urgent need for a proper career development path within the Organization. This would allow WHO to reap the benefit of an individual's unique knowledge of the inner workings and procedures of the Organization. The staff associations welcome the fact that the Organization committed itself to improving career development at the last meeting of the Global Staff/Management Council, and will be closely monitoring this initiative. When the opportunity is presented, the management should sincerely consider people from within.

7. The staff associations wish to bring to your attention, as they have on previous occasions, the plight of general service staff. Professional staff can be assigned and reassigned to different duty stations, and therefore only the general service staff can provide a living history of WHO programmes. Two concrete steps that can open career opportunities for general service staff are the waiving of the geographical criteria for at least the P.1 and P.2 levels, and the introduction of national professional officer posts in the regional offices. These measures will allow locally recruited staff to climb up the career ladder.

8. It is particularly worthy of mention that such an effort would inscribe itself within the trend set by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in his recent report to the General Assembly, in which he indicated his strong support for enhancing career prospects for general service staff, recognized the need to achieve gender balance among professionals at the senior levels, and recommended that resources for staff training be increased.¹

9. **Training.** Human resources, like any other resource, should be nurtured. Indeed, in a knowledge-based organization such as WHO, training is crucial to allow our staff to maintain their competitive edge and efficiency. While management has indicated that it has recognized these needs by starting a process to identify training needs, and in some regional offices by tasking a regional group to study training requirements, there is a stark lack of financial resources to fulfil the recommendations emanating from these studies.

10. **Rehiring of retirees.** We note with disappointment the continuous practice of rehiring retirees. We believe that there is wisdom in obliging staff members to retire at a certain age, and we encourage the management to respect this principle. The practice of rehiring of retirees is often brought about by nepotism and affects the morale of serving staff; in particular, it often hinders the career advancement of serving staff.

11. **Performance management and development.** The system has been introduced because of the need to evaluate staff more objectively. The system of evaluating staff performance based on actual work done is one that the staff associations applaud. However, there is a need to strengthen and expand the application of the system. The results of the system should be tied to promotion, further

¹ Document A/57/387.

training, career reorientation and development in relation to the general human resources planning and development of the Organization.

12. **Competency project.** The staff associations welcome the introduction of the competency project as a global initiative. The development of core and managerial competencies is an area of concern that the staff associations have been raising for a long time. In the area of core competencies, it is well known that many staff in the Organization perform well beyond the level expected of them, as indicated in their terms of reference. These levels of skills need to be recognized and rewarded. It is our firm belief that the competency project will disclose what we have suspected for a long time: the high level of core competencies among the staff that has gone unrewarded for too long. With regard to managerial competencies, it has long been a criticism of the staff associations that staff in this Organization suffer from inappropriate and inefficient management behaviour. The staff associations will be watching with interest the development of this new initiative in which they hope to participate.

13. **Managing conflict and grievances.** We welcome the Secretary-General's comments on the improvement of the internal justice system and we call for the establishment of easier procedures for preventing and resolving conflict within the Organization. In particular, we draw your attention to one of the issues aired by the inspection team concerning the proper legal advice for and representation of staff, who are at a disadvantage in this respect compared with management, which can rely on the support of the legal and administrative services of the various organizations. In conflict, there is no real winner. We look forward to the day when the system of justice will outlive its relevance in the United Nations system because management and staff are in complete harmony, brought about by mutual respect and mutual trust.

14. The Director-General has started meaningful reforms in the Organization. We are glad to note that she has seen part of her reforms implemented during her term. She has committed herself to finding a solution to the problem of long-term-false-temporary staff at headquarters, and we are happy to report that at long last this problem is starting to be addressed. Her successor should be able not only to continue the reforms, but strengthen the principles laid out again and again in this forum.

15. In particular, the staff associations have welcomed the creation of the Global Staff/Management Council, initiated during her term. This important body has allowed a dialogue and consultation between administration and staff to evolve. A proposal on negotiations procedures was submitted to the Council at its meeting in June 2000. A revised one will be proposed by the staff associations to the Council at its next meeting in March 2003 with the objective of building a fruitful partnership between what we hope will come to be seen as two equal parties, discussing common objectives for the benefit of staff and the Organization.

16. Dr Brundtland has signified no intention of standing for re-election. A new Director-General will be elected this year. To the frontrunners, the test of leadership is to create an environment in which integrity emanates from the top and builds up from the ground. The challenge is to create a corporate culture that encourages and rewards integrity as it does performance. Although we accept that politics is part of our existence, we should not allow politics to rule us and dictate the activities of the Organization.

17. As you formulate policies and programmes and look at the daunting tasks ahead, please do not lose sight of the situation of the staff. When you lay out strategic directions for WHO, please include us and communicate with us, as transparency and inclusiveness will boost staff loyalty. We are your soldiers and it is only when we work together openly that we can carry out the true mandate of WHO.