

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 WHO staff associations in the regions, at headquarters and in IARC, I deem it an honour to submit this statement to the Executive Board. We appreciate this opportunity to address the Board to update it on matters concerning human resources policy and practice, and also to place on record some of the concerns of the staff associations in this regard. In the past, we have brought a number of issues to your attention and some of these may also be highlighted here. However, rather than simply making a few requests, we would also like to underscore some positive steps taken by the Organization.
2. We greatly appreciate the initiative of the Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, to meet with Presidents of the staff associations in March last year. Her spirit of cooperation and her recognition of the positive role of staff associations in policy development in the Organization are warmly welcomed by staff. As agreed during that meeting, we look forward to more regular interactions between the Director-General and the Presidents of the staff associations. We are pleased to note that there has been a better and smoother staff/management consultative process at headquarters. It is imperative that the same spirit of active partnership is further extended to the regions and IARC.
3. The staff associations recognize this opportunity to reciprocate and we commit ourselves to supporting the positive attitude of the executive management and to contributing actively to this process. We believe that in a large Organization like ours, there may be some issues that require further attention. We take this opportunity to highlight a few issues which have been discussed in some forums in the past.
4. Although the staff associations recognize the need for flexibility to cater for regional situations, there is a general feeling that selection procedures and processes across the Organization should adhere to some fundamental common minimum requirements, including effective staff representation in the selection process. In this regard, while some offices have been following bilaterally accepted practices, these vary among different locations. There should be sincere efforts to harmonize this practice across all offices and regions.
5. The Global Staff/Management Council in 2006 recommended the establishment of a working group comprising representatives from the management, staff associations and technical programmes in order to consider proposals for harmonizing and streamlining selection procedures for fixed-term positions. To date, no progress has been noted in the establishment of this working group. In the meantime, the number of selections has greatly increased as a result of the contractual reforms that came into effect from 1 July 2007. The Organization also needs a harmonized approach to facilitate an effective policy on rotation and to allow for career development of internationally recruited staff.

6. The implementation of the global management system will affect a number of staff across the Organization. Staff associations are grateful to the Director-General and Regional Directors for their commitment to keep staff reduction as low as possible or almost nil. At headquarters, support measures have been developed and a package for separation by mutual agreement is available for staff. These measures should be applied globally, in the same way as the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules. The staff associations play an active role in guiding and preparing staff to meet the new challenges posed by the global management system. We encourage staff to appreciate the positive effects of this new managerial tool, which may change for the better our way of working in the Organization, and which offers manifold new opportunities for some. Some progress has been made in the area of communicating with staff. However, there must be clear plans for reprofiling, training and redeployment as deadlines for implementation of the global management system get extended.

7. WHO has always been a learning organization which considers its staff members to be its strongest asset. Clearly, the development of their skills and expertise contribute significantly to meeting the Organization's strategic objectives and goals. The availability of funds through the WHO Staff Development and Learning Fund and the establishment of a Global Learning Committee have stimulated interest and investment in this area. While the Organization has a policy on staff development and learning, the conviction with which it is implemented varies from region to region. Like any other Organization-wide policy, its implementation should be uniformly applied across all offices with accountability and transparency, and with periodical reports.

8. As mentioned earlier, the Director-General had acknowledged the important consultative role that the staff associations play in matters related to personnel policy and conditions of service, and the need for effective staff associations to operate in a constructive atmosphere. While staff associations at headquarters and some regions have experienced greater commitment on the part of the management and administration to build a stronger and more dynamic consultative process, there has been little or no progress elsewhere. In order for the staff associations to work effectively with the management and administration, we again reiterate the need for good support to the associations, including the provision of adequate time for the representatives to perform their functions which, so far, has not been granted in some regions.

9. We believe that good communication, open dialogue, and good faith should be the driving forces behind the discussions between the administration and the staff to foster and strengthen Organization-wide collaborative work. We also recall the discussions at the meeting of the Global Staff/Management Council in 2003, when the staff associations presented a new partnership approach towards improving staff/management relations, based on a series of key behaviours and principles that included open and meaningful consultation and flexibility. The Global Staff/Management Council adopted a set of guiding principles for Organization-wide application which have been incorporated into the WHO Manual. The subsequent meeting of the Council in 2004 was preceded by a workshop involving management and staff as part of the ongoing process towards improved employment relations. While we look forward to continued commitment in putting these principles and approaches into good practice and in working towards an effective partnership arrangement, we sincerely hope that the regional leadership will demonstrate adherence to and transparency in the implementation of the guiding principles provided in the Manual.

10. We continue to be concerned about the internal justice system. Even though the institution of Ombudsman has been established, it is not uniformly present across all regions. While headquarters has two Ombudsmen and an Ombudsman's assistant, some regional offices lack an Ombudsman, and other regions have active serving staff who perform the function of Ombudsman in addition to their normal duties. The possibility of establishing this function in all WHO offices should be explored in consultation with the staff associations concerned.

11. In spite of our Director-General's interest in a good flow of communication and interaction between management and staff, we regret that the meeting of the Global Staff/Management Council – the principal consultative body which annually brings together management and staff association representatives to discuss personnel policies and service conditions – did not take place in 2007. Despite their enquiries, the staff associations have not been informed whether this important meeting has been cancelled or postponed. In the spirit of collaboration expressed by the Director-General, the staff associations presume that the meetings of the Global Staff/Management Council will be held according to schedule and that any change in this regard will be communicated to and discussed with staff in a timely fashion.

CONCLUSION

- We support the Director-General in her efforts to take forward the spirit of cooperation and staff/management collaboration and look forward to a continued dialogue between the Director-General and the Presidents of the WHO staff associations.
- We request that staff associations in all regions and offices continue to be given due recognition and facilities to discharge their mandated roles.
- We reiterate the need for harmonization of the principles and procedures for selection to fixed-term positions across the Organization.
- There is a need for a definitive timeframe and plans for the implementation of the global management system including training, reprofiling and redeployment. Training should be part of the roll-out plan for the global management system and related costs should not be charged in full to the budget apportioned for normal staff development and learning activities.
- The policy on staff development and learning should be implemented throughout the Organization with greater managerial accountability and transparency, and with periodical reporting.
- The internal justice system needs to be further strengthened through consultation with the staff associations, and in line with the principles adopted in the United Nations system.
- The provisions and guiding principles of the WHO Manual concerning the staff/management consultative mechanism should be respected and a meeting of the Global Staff/Management Council should be held every year to discuss important issues affecting the staff and the Organization.

12. Finally, we, the staff of WHO, recognize and appreciate the trust placed in us by our governing bodies and reiterate our commitment to continue working to accomplish the mandates given by you to the Organization and towards the attainment of the goals of the Organization. We thank you for your support and encouragement and look forward to the continued support and guidance of the Board. On our part, we restate our dedication, as committed international civil servants, to the service of the Member States and the health of their populations.

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