

Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations

1. Through a variety of efforts, and at the behest of the Executive Board, the Secretariat has increasingly and at great effort been addressing the issue of greater transparency and accountability of the Organization. From a more open and public planning process and the implementation of an enterprise resource planning system, to the consolidation of ethics guidelines, WHO has taken a number of steps towards making the organizational culture more responsive and responsible.
2. In the interest of encouraging these efforts, the staff associations would like to point out three areas for improvement of transparency and accountability:
 - (i) the potential conflict of interest of WHO staff members running for elected positions within the Organization;
 - (ii) the development and implementation of the Global Management System;
 - (iii) the effect of the global financial crisis on WHO's work.

WHO ELECTIONS

3. The WHO staff associations would like to express their concern to the Executive Board on the potential conflict of interest of WHO staff members who are running for elected office.
4. Staff members of the Organization have access to budgets and resources that can be very useful during an election campaign, whether that is virtually unlimited travel, direct access to key voting members of country delegations, or the ability to hire personnel for high-ranking advisory positions from Member States. Not only do such levers of power give incumbents an unequal advantage, but they have a demoralizing effect on staff as they see precious resources squandered on what could appear to be individual political ambitions.
5. We understand that WHO is first and foremost a health technical agency, but with its highest leadership directly elected by Member States, inevitably there is a political element. Without rules governing electoral behaviour at the highest level, there is a risk that the most cynical views concerning the United Nations may be reinforced in the public's perception.
6. We also note that historically some staff members running for office, including the current Director-General, have of their own volition during their campaign for office, recused themselves from their institutional duties to avoid even the perception of conflict of interest. We feel that this is an excellent example and should be followed by all WHO staff who choose to run for office.

7. In the interest of the greater transparency and accountability that we all want to foster at all levels of the Organization, we ask the Executive Board to consider a mandatory leave of absence for all staff running for elected office during election campaign periods and to request incumbents who are not running again to be mindful of their administrative choices and their political implications.

THE GLOBAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

8. The WHO staff associations would like to applaud WHO staff in all offices for their efforts to make the System increasingly functional and express recognition of those staff who have been patiently coping with its numerous shortcomings. The resilience and flexibility of staff have been essential in keeping the Organization functioning through this period of transition from legacy systems to the installation of a global enterprise resource planning system.

9. However, we would like to remind the Executive Board of the conclusions set out in the External Auditor's report to the Sixty-first World Health Assembly in May 2008,¹ just weeks prior to the initial rollout of the Global Management System at headquarters and in the Regional Office for the Western Pacific, which had numerous recommendations. In his report the External Auditor pointed out that the project management methodology agreed upon by the Organization had not been followed, training plans were inadequate, security weak, and that end-to-end testing of the System had not been done – among many other conclusions. The External Auditor went on to say that the institution risked implementing a flawed system whose repair would be many times more costly, time consuming and potentially damaging to the institution unless the recommendations were followed prior to the System's release.

10. The administration gave its word that all of the recommendations would be followed prior to the "go live" date.

11. As the legion of unpaid staff can attest, together with those whose work has been disrupted and vendors who have not been paid, there is very little evidence – despite on-the-record assurances to the Executive Board – that many of the recommendations were followed.

12. The staff associations over the last year and a half have repeatedly asked for a full account of what has or has not been done regarding the recommendations of the External Auditor, and after repeated assurances of such an account and promise of an external evaluation of the design and implementation process, we have yet to see anything.

13. Progress on the Global Management System has been slow but substantive. The System has become increasingly stable, and has begun to show value as a planning tool for senior administration. However, for the assistant and line manager, there have been few improvements in the user interface and workflow and, on the whole, transactions take significantly longer than under the legacy systems, with payment problems still commonplace. The Global Service Centre, which has been tasked with much of the burden of making the System functional, has required its staff to use multiple 'work arounds' to deal with the inflexibility and fragility of the System. But most significantly, cost savings and gains in efficiency are not apparent to most users and in fact most users do not feel the System even meets the baseline of the legacy systems.

¹ Document A61/23.

14. We would encourage the Executive Board to ask the WHO administration for a third-party evaluation on the development and implementation of the Global Management System to be contracted and implemented within the year and made publicly available. We would be delighted if the focus of the evaluation included actual cost savings and efficiencies gained, if any.

GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS

15. The global financial crisis puts a double burden on an organization like the WHO. During periods when our work is most needed, resources are most scarce.

16. Additionally, the management of existing resources is made more difficult with the increase of voluntary earmarked contributions and the reluctance of donors to pay the programme support costs. The result is that the Organization's ability to strategically apply even its existing resources to priority and vital areas is hampered by how funding is managed in the Organization.

17. Member States have called for WHO to be more results driven, yet at the same time WHO is increasingly burdened with underfunded mandates and increasingly higher expectations and more critical needs.

18. The WHO staff associations would like to ask Member States to show greater trust in the administrations that they have appointed, and increase the proportion of unearmarked funding of the budget as a whole, to better allow WHO to strategically allocate its resources during turbulent times, and to better plan with Member States for mutually agreed long-term strategic priorities. In equal measure, we would like the WHO administration to be diligent on the transparency of how the money is actually spent.

19. The reduction in the WHO budget in real terms has a direct impact on its staff, in terms of both job security and our effectiveness in performing our mission on behalf of Member States. If staff are to be negatively affected by the current economic climate, as they most assuredly will be, then we ask that the Organization be given the institutional means to manage this situation with greater flexibility to moderate its impact on staff and to allow greater focus for health priorities. We also ask that the administration continue to earn such trust by accelerating its efforts towards improved transparency and accountability.

20. The WHO staff associations recognize and value the efforts of WHO administration and staff to achieve greater transparency and accountability, but also feel that we could do more. Our comments on the three areas concerned are respectfully submitted for your consideration.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

21. The Board is invited to note this report.

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