

Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations

1. All of the Staff Associations of WHO are concerned about the challenges we face. However we do not believe that these occurred overnight. We believe that the symptoms of our current illness were long known and we wonder why the remedies are palliative and come so late in the day. Nonetheless, we would like to use this opportunity to share our views on why, now more than ever, a critical review of the proposed human resources policies and practices are needed before implementation is even considered. The Staff Associations fully support reforms that will lead to a stronger and better performing secretariat to support Member States and achieve our shared mission, but this needs to be done consultatively and systematically. We feel that a piecemeal approach is being applied to a system-wide malaise and that this approach will not bring us out of the crisis.

2. WHO staff have a clear vested interest in the success of WHO, and care as much as, or perhaps in some cases, more than any other stakeholder. Given the concern of the staff, and recognizing the fact that competent and motivated staff are among the greatest assets of the Organization, we would like to bring to your attention five of our main concerns during this period of reform.

3. The first is that WHO Staff Associations are united, perhaps more than ever before, and are fully committed to adopting change towards a stronger, more efficient and effective World Health Organization. But the means to do so must be fair and transparent for staff, and be based on a long-term vision of where we are going.

- In January of this year, the Executive Board requested the Director-General to submit for consideration a modification to Staff Rule 420.2 that would result in a much more restricted policy for granting continuing appointments. Member States should be aware, however, that this type of appointment was introduced primarily to reduce administrative burden and that, in WHO, a continuous appointment is not equivalent to a permanent or life-long employment as it is known from many national civil service schemes. Any appointment can be terminated if the post of the incumbent is being abolished. The right to reassignment of longer-serving staff merely reflects the obligation of the Organization to respect the duty of care towards employees. As international civil servants who do not participate in national social protection schemes, we are very concerned about any plans to reduce these entitlements. Such changes will also affect negatively the attractiveness of WHO as an employer and may jeopardize the Organization's ability, in the future, to attract staff with the highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity.
- In March, we had extensive discussions during the Global Staff Management Committee (GSMC) meeting with representatives from all major WHO offices. Based on our analysis and discussions with staff across the Organization, we indicated that any proposed changes to the Staff Rules would be premature. The Organization is still discussing the main directions

of the reform process and the outlines of an eventual new workforce model. Changing the Staff Rules prematurely and without linking these changes to an agreed staffing model, based on the strategic direction of the Organization and its expected new strategic risk management model, will not only be a waste of efforts, but will also send a negative message that will demotivate staff and managers, and may unnecessarily impact the performance or delivery of some programmes.

- Management is proposing a new Workforce Staffing Model that would result in contract modality changes. It also proposes new contractual arrangements for staff in time-limited activities of the Organization, such as projects. While the Staff Associations welcome these innovations, we find that the details of the staffing model need to be carefully thought through. This staffing model, which should provide the justification for changes to the current Staff Rules, is in the early stages of concept development and is therefore not ready for implementation.
- The foundation for implementing meaningful reform across all levels of the Organization requires that a selective set of strategic priorities and information and a detailed human resources workforce model are used and articulated. This would guide the reform process to invest appropriately in human resources and an innovative workforce, and build accountability mechanisms that support these innovations. We believe that we could work together during 2011 and communicate further consensus during 2012.
- We also would like to draw your attention to the Joint Inspection Unit report (JIU/REP/2009/6) regarding offshoring in the United Nations. This report made a clear analysis of the issues and also made recommendations on aspects of risks posed to staff by offshoring. It highlighted, for example, that the employment of an increased number of National Programme Officers in offshore service centres may pose a risk of undermining the international character of the United Nations organizations; that no report exists to demonstrate the cost-saving and service quality goals of the established major offshore service centres of the United Nations organizations; and that appropriate measures should be taken in an exemplary manner to mitigate the impact of offshoring on staff.

4. A second key point is that staff deserve to understand why these reforms are necessary and where WHO is heading. If this is primarily due to the financial crisis, staff across the Organization have voiced concern that there was no meaningful anticipation of this financial crisis. The abandonment of currency hedging when it was most needed as reflected by the lack of strategic risk management processes is here to haunt us today. Contradictory messages on the causes of the current state of affairs have been circulated and this also does not help staff or management to understand the situation and develop sensible and fair solutions.

- We have requested a forward-looking, sustainable financing strategy for the Organization, that includes appropriate protection and safeguard mechanisms. This may require the reintroduction of certain safeguards that have been removed and the setting up of new ones that reflect current best practices or as recommended by the auditors through a more efficient and systematic strategic risk management. Furthermore, the Staff Associations have suggested that WHO request donors to contribute to this strategic risk management by guaranteeing their contributions and protecting them against the variations in the exchange rates.
- The Staff Associations fully recognize the need to make savings. We do see, however, possibilities to make institutional savings in general administrative functions, such as finances

and human resource management. These could be achieved by identifying synergies and re-centralizing certain functions across clusters and even major offices. We have suggested meaningful consideration and evaluation of a wider range of efficiency and accountability measures addressing non-staff expenditures that go beyond reducing travel and publication costs, such as part-time work, reducing the top-heavy structure, and job-sharing, in order to make the Organization more efficient and fit for purpose. This includes better use of existing mechanisms, such as rotation and mobility aligned to strategic requirements at each level, and focusing staff cuts where management is top heavy or where there is duplication of functions, to convey a genuine sense of accountability for management decisions.

- The Staff Associations would like to underscore the critical importance of obtaining more support for increasing assessed contributions and unearmarked funding to the WHO budget. This will allow WHO to allocate its resources strategically during turbulent times, and to allow for greater flexibility in responding to Member States' needs. Member States should recognize that the dependency on voluntary contributions has reached a critical level that may cause a deviation in, or threaten the strategic directions of, the Organization.

5. That leads us to our third major point – accountability. Staff want to be assured that senior managers will be held accountable if we are unable to anticipate the crisis and protect the Organization. Accountability means taking responsibility for poor decisions, not just taking credit for successes.

- The Director-General has acknowledged that some aspects of the current crisis in WHO are due to management shortcomings. The Staff Associations are not willing to accept that staff are the only ones to pay for those shortcomings. Moreover, the Director-General has evoked the need to learn from best practices in the private sector. Staff have been informed that the current staff reductions are necessary due to the financial crisis (although this is not the only reason) triggered by a huge deficit. Staff are bewildered to hear of such a huge deficit, that is unprecedented in the financial history of WHO. Many questions remain unanswered. To determine the exact cause of this huge deficit and to ensure that WHO will not be confronted with a similar situation in the future, we support the recommendation of the IEOAC to develop a strategic risk management model.
- The Director-General has publicly stated on several occasions that she strongly supports the introduction of “360-degree ” performance reviews, which usually include assessments by the staff member, supervisors, peers and direct reports – this would be an important, concrete step towards building trust and demonstrating that WHO is implementing a new mechanism to improve the way we do business.
- Another part of management accountability is the need for a clear process to revise, implement and monitor the new WHO policy on the prevention of harassment. WHO needs to include approaches to prevent harassment, such as mandatory training, and to put into practice zero tolerance of all forms of harassment at all levels throughout WHO. This would require reported acts of harassment, abuse of power, retaliation or other unacceptable behaviours to be acted on immediately, rather than being potentially covered up or minimized.

6. Our fourth point is that there is a need for stronger internal coordination and solidarity among the Organization's offices because staff do not understand why we are not working as one WHO.

- Key elements for a successful and united “one WHO” include a strengthened and well-resourced human resources function, where rules are applied without discrimination, fairly and equally, across all offices, and where staff know exactly where to find information on entitlements and other personnel issues; a coordinated and successful Resource Mobilization effort that puts money where it will be most effective; and a strong and coordinated voice to communicate WHO’s worth to the press and the world at large. Staff are wondering why WHO is not more widely acknowledged in the international media for its achievements.

7. This brings us to the fifth point. Staff Associations wish to be heard by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee in order to be able to provide their input and expertise when needed, and to ensure that WHO establishes and implements mechanisms that anticipate and protect the Organization against similar problems in the future. The Staff Associations have proposed very clear and immediate cost-saving mechanisms: an immediate halt to the abusive re-hiring of retirees against long-term functions, even if only to fill a gap during recruitment; and monitoring of Agreements for Performance of Work or short-term consultancies, in order to avoid misuse of these “external” contracts. These would go a long way towards preserving the Organization’s greatest asset – its staff.

8. To recap, the combined Staff Associations are calling for (1) fairness and transparency for staff, (2) full disclosure of the reasons for the current situation, (3) accountability for management decisions that have back-fired, (4) a coordinated and strong commitment to a Human Resources plan, and (5) the need for Staff Associations’ participation to be heard by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee.

9. The Staff Associations join together in welcoming the Director-General’s initiative to meet with staff in public forums, her willingness to engage with the Staff Associations on matters affecting staff and her openness to address proactively the crisis we are facing. We fully agree that the Organization’s greatest asset and resource is its staff, and we heard “without staff, there is no WHO” clearly expressed during the Town Hall meeting with all staff in January 2011. However, staff need to see some real evidence that they are valued by top management, otherwise it seems like an empty refrain. We believe that strategic and visionary thinking, driven not only by the lack of funding, but also by the desire to mitigate the negative impact of public health challenges and to improve the health of people most in need, is key.

10. There was a time when WHO was perceived as the jewel in the crown of the international agencies. We invoke your help in investing more in WHO and in its staff, as well in a stronger human resources policy, so that we are equipped to meet the Millennium Development Goals and our other mandates. This crisis offers an opportunity for the Organization to reposition itself and to acquire new vigour. A strong WHO is in the best interests of staff, and a WHO at the centre of global health again will have the ripple effect of attracting funding, and enhancing staff motivation and performance. Now more than ever, the staff of WHO calls on your support.

The Staff Associations of the World Health Organization.

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