

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

1. We would like to open our statement by extending our best wishes for 2013 to our Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, and to all Executive Board members. The WHO staff associations strongly believe that meaningful consultation, constructive debate and consensus-building on important issues will pave the way for our Organization to overcome current difficulties, to put in practice reform objectives to improve global health and to meet the demands of Member States for renewed strategic WHO leadership in the global health arena. A key message is that in order for staff to deliver on their duties and responsibilities, to contribute to and carry out the Organization's mandate in global health, staff need an enabling environment to perform.

2. Our statement is supported by the 10 staff associations representing nearly 10 000 United Nations employees serving under WHO Staff Regulations and Rules.<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that we attended and actively participated in the 2012 Global Staff Management Council (GSMC) hosted by PAHO, in Washington, DC, to discuss with management several proposals that will affect staff conditions of service. While we had a fruitful dialogue on a number of important issues including the promotion of a respectful and healthy workplace, the mandatory age of separation, performance management, and the overall framework of staff-management relations, we also raised our grave concerns on the lack of meaningful consultation on proposed changes to Staff Rules on appointment policies.

3. The proposed amendments to appointment policies, within Staff Rules 420, 1040 and 1050, include phasing out continuing appointments and increasing the eligibility requirement for the right to reassignment process from five years of continuous, uninterrupted service, to 10 years. These changes are proposed to be applied to future and many current staff as of February 2013, despite repeated indications from management that existing staff would not be affected by proposed changes to appointment policies.

4. In the interest of time, we focus on a few key issues. The implication of proposed changes to the right to reassignment is that, in the event of post abolition, staff members with less than 10 years of continuous, uninterrupted service would not be entitled to reassignment, nor to the six months of time as a staff member when reassignment options are identified and reviewed. This means that a long serving staff member's contract (up to 9 years and 11 months) may be terminated with only three months' notice prior to separation. As international civil servants, we have no institutional or national unemployment insurance or other social security benefit that provides a financial cushion during a transition to another job. The lack of a financial safety net can place staff under great pressure,

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<sup>1</sup> WHO headquarters Staff Association; WHO Staff Association, GSC Chapter; Staff Association of the African Region; Staff Association of the Eastern Mediterranean Region; Staff Association of the European Region; Staff Association of the Pan American Health Organization; Staff Association of the South-East Asia Region; Staff Association of the Western Pacific Region; UNAIDS Secretariat Staff Association; and IARC Staff Association.

especially those who have to leave their duty station quickly and are required to take children out of schools in the middle of the school year, while scrambling to find new jobs and schools often in another country. This situation is not theoretical, as we have seen this unfortunate and difficult reality unfold repeatedly during the recent downsizing that has taken place in WHO headquarters, affecting those without the right to reassignment.

5. Staff Associations oppose the delaying of eligibility for reassignment from five to 10 years: such a reform will degrade the limited social protection that exists now. Staff do not understand why or how raising the eligibility requirement for reassignment from five to 10 years would advance the supposed objective of “creating a more efficient, effective and flexible workforce.” The proposed change may negatively affect staff service who have served even longer than 10 years: for staff who joined the Organization under a temporary appointment and worked in this capacity for several years before being appointed to a fixed-term contract. Staff Associations requested cost benefit analysis that would show how the proposed change could be in the interest of the Organization, and in line with its duty of care for staff, given that this proposal also appears to be inconsistent with the proposed contract reform within the United Nations common system and international labour standards, as well as other Organizational imperatives such as mobility and rotation, attracting and retaining the most qualified people from around the world, and reaching and maintaining gender parity in the workforce.

6. Staff Associations see the need for a staffing model that reflects the short-, medium- and long-term needs and interests of the Organization, and enables strategic workforce management. We continue to emphasize the value of making a clear distinction between posts and staff contracts – as well as a distinction between short-term and longer-term positions. Posts and their functions need to evolve in response to global and country health priorities. Staff would have legitimate expectations to grow in their careers and be expected to move across posts as priorities shift, while maintaining independence. A workforce model must be aligned with and reflect the Organization’s core values, including loyalty and impartiality. This is our vision of workforce flexibility. We hope there will be opportunities to resume discussions on the WHO workforce model in the near future.

7. Staff Associations are concerned to see proposals that focus narrowly on reductions in staffing costs, without due consideration about the implications for being able to attract and retain the best talent globally and provide minimal social protection to staff. Staff Associations asked for clarifications and cost benefit analysis on the proposed amendments to the Staff Rules made to us at the Global Staff Management Council in October 2012, that would help us understand implications for the Organization. As part of our meaningful consultation process set out in Staff Rule 920, Staff Associations note that the additional information provided to us following the meeting, lacked evidence-based justification or alternative scenarios. We know that Member States, public administrations and businesses alike require such basic, critical information to inform and justify decisions.

8. In the interest of time, one example is that the Staff Associations requested a gender analysis of the proposed move to a 10 year, continuous and uninterrupted service requirement for eligibility for reassignment and projected impact on WHO’s workforce. The Staff Associations believe that this proposal needs serious review for the possibility of disproportionate negative impacts on women in the Organization, given that women continue to be more likely than men to interrupt their careers for family reasons. We have received no analysis from the WHO Administration that would either validate or otherwise address our concerns. Given WHO’s commitment to the UN Gender System-wide Action Plan to reach gender parity by 2019 in professional positions P4 and above, such analysis is even more important. We note that in the human resources annual report to the Executive Board (document EB132/38), there was a reduction in 2012 in the overall participation of women in WHO’s workforce – a first time reversal in this trend observed over the past decade.

9. We are all well aware of the recent staff cuts and reduced expenditures, as documented in the human resources annual report (document EB132/38). We feel there are three key data points worth drawing your attention to:

(a) The Organization recorded a reduction in its payroll costs of around US\$ 7 million per month since March 2012 – an overall saving of 8.5%. For the period 2011–2012, it is expected that staffing costs will be brought in line with predicted available financial resources (paragraph 6).

(b) Overall, the Organization's staffing level was reduced by 937 people holding either long-term or temporary contracts during this period, i.e. a reduction of 11.3% across major offices (paragraph 5).

(c) Current projections show that 981 staff (15% of the total workforce) are due to retire during the next 5 years (20% of the professional and higher categories). Over the next 10 years, 2102 staff (32% of the total workforce) are due to retire (41.6% of the professional and higher categories) (paragraph 55).

10. While there has been much discussion about the need to align costs with revenues – a principle that we can all support – we feel there has been insufficient attention to the varied implications of such staffing reductions for the Organization and our leadership in global health, both now and for the medium-term. The Staff Associations feel strongly that it is not too early to begin discussion and planning in response to the known, massive departure of experienced, current staff. We would recommend that such discussion be situated within a medium- or longer-term vision of the Organization's priorities and activities to improve global health, and that we develop a workforce model that corresponds with this vision, as well as anticipate and plan for other implications, such as after-service obligations including the health insurance of retired staff members. While staffing is being reduced, expectations of the Organization are only increasing. In the proposed 2014–2015 biennium programme budget, there is a foreseen increase in activities, particularly in relation to our support to reaching and reporting on major international health goals and deadlines.

11. While we recognize the current difficult financial position of WHO, particularly in headquarters and some of the Regional Offices, we believe that proposed changes to Staff Rules and conditions of service should be based on sound analysis – sufficiently detailed scenarios accompanied by basic calculations of the expected benefits of different decisions, along with a commitment to accountability and adherence with fundamental international labour standards, and the protection of the independence and impartiality of the international civil service. We see this as constituting the basic conditions for meaningful and well-informed dialogue between staff, the Organization and Member States.

12. Staff Associations believe that much can be done to strengthen the use of the current framework of Staff Regulations and Staff Rules to promote workforce flexibility. During the Global Staff Management Council we heard of examples of process improvements – such as the establishment of rosters for some functions and roles that have in turn significantly reduced recruitment time. We think that other pragmatic innovations, together with active management oversight – can advance the Organization's goal of greater workforce flexibility. We are concerned by proposed amendments to Staff Rules that purport to enable greater flexibility, but instead appear to have significant potential to increase transaction costs associated with the frequent re-establishment of contracts. These costs are non-negligible and could needlessly result in a transfer of resources away from the technical and programmatic aspects of the Organization's work, towards increased administrative costs.

13. In light of the limited time (four days prior to the Global Staff Management Council) allowed for consultation to discuss the key document on appointment policy on the proposed amendments to Staff Rules and conditions of services, and in the absence of basic information and any cost-benefit analysis, we have informed management that a meaningful consultation as outlined in Staff Rule 920 has not been met. That being noted, we have expressed our willingness to continue discussions with management, with a view to finding innovative and sustainable solutions that maintain staff social security and enable our Organization to employ the right people at the right time to do the job that we are mandated to do. In our view, only with clear, strategic and long-term human resource planning and adequate social security protections, can a workforce achieve true flexibility.

14. With this in mind, we have put forward a preliminary proposal for a redeployment and unemployment protection fund, which would serve as an unemployment insurance mechanism that would be jointly financed by staff and the Organization, similar to the Staff Health Insurance fund and many similar funds found in the private sector. We were pleased that management representatives indicated their support for further consultation with the respective Staff Associations across the Organization. We have also advocated for greater efforts to reduce non-staff costs, a review of approaches to managing the future liabilities of the Organization, and cost-effectiveness analysis of the different options under discussion. We regret, however, that a management decision has been made to go ahead with proposing amendments to the Staff Rules without meaningful consideration of the proposals offered by the Staff Associations.

15. The Staff Associations continue to highlight the need to improve the enabling environment that staff work in. One example is the need for internal justice reform. International organizations must offer an internal system of justice – covering receivability, investigation, review, decision and redress – that adheres to the standards, principles and aspirations of the United Nations. Among other criteria, this means the system of justice must demonstrate “independence, transparency, effectiveness, efficiency and fairness” (see UN General Assembly Resolution 59/283). We are advocating for a review of our internal justice mechanisms, in particular in relation to behavioural misconduct, with a view to enhancing independence, due process and timeliness of the outcomes, and ensuring that all staff are treated equally irrespective of position or location.

16. We wish to reiterate that staff support the goal of improving the Organization’s effectiveness and ability to improve the health of people around the world. This is a vision that unites staff, Administration and Member States. We hope that the crucially important decisions on proposed amendments to Staff Rules, especially on appointment policies, put forward to you this week are thoroughly studied and reviewed. Should you reach the conclusion following your deliberations that further information is needed, we would respectfully ask that you consider deferring any endorsement of options to the next Executive Board meeting in May 2013. Such a deferral would provide us with an opportunity to receive further information and analysis regarding the implications of the proposals, and engage in evidence informed discussions between Administration and all staff associations. Given the potential impacts of the proposals on the Organization’s future and its core asset – its staff – we feel that the additional consultation would be both prudent and useful.

17. To conclude, we thank you for the opportunity to address you today and engage in dialogue. Effective, respectful and meaningful staff management relations is one of the conditions for an enabling working environment and a stronger WHO. Staff care deeply and feel strongly about the future of the Organization. We look forward to hearing and understanding the views and priorities of you, our Member States, as they relate to the concerns of staff we have shared with you today.

Thank you very much.

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