

Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations

Madam Chairperson, honourable members of the Executive Board, Dr Chan, delegates, and colleagues,

1. The 10 Staff Associations that participate in the WHO Global Staff-Management Council (GSMC) wish to express their appreciation and support to the Director-General, Dr Margaret Chan, in her efforts to lead and reform the Organization. We are also very pleased for the opportunity to present to the Executive Board our perspective regarding the opportunities and challenges we are currently facing, and to update on progress on the priorities we identified at earlier sessions.

2. The Staff Associations are engaged with the Administration in many aspects of WHO reform. We are confident that the reform will help the Organization realize its full potential through a motivated, high-performing workforce, fit for purpose, that can adapt to the evolving challenges faced by countries. In this process, we observe that increasing expectations from Member States and partners also place increasing demands on staff. While we are committed to the success of the reform, we also ask our governing bodies to support us in increasing efficiencies and addressing the constraints we face. In particular, it is unrealistic to expect greater health improvements with increasingly limited human and financial resources.

3. Greater impact requires better prepared staff. Investing in **staff professional development** – in all categories and duty stations – is an important component to improve WHO performance overall. Better management of individual careers and availability of opportunities is required. We also need a performance management system that allows personal and team accomplishments to be recognized. Staff acknowledge that progress in our collective performance and impact is a shared responsibility between ourselves and the Administration. Through our dialogue in the GSMC and other fora, we see opportunities for improvement. We must be realistic about the hard work ahead, much will have to be done to enhance current managerial practices, such as performance management, which when misused can damage the Organization's reputation and staff morale. We request your support for this change in developing an organizational culture where good ideas and practices are recognized and can be quickly converted into real progress.

4. In this context, retaining talent and creating career pathways should become an imperative at every level within the workforce, including assistants, other support staff, national professional officers and international professionals. We need to invest to attract promising young people and to offer them opportunities to grow within WHO or the United Nations system. Such efforts will mean our Directors-General will have a reliable, efficient workforce which understands our multiple dimensions and carries forward an institutional memory.

5. The second pillar of WHO reform, **staff mobility**, is an important issue that requires careful consideration. Such an initiative will need to take into consideration the professional and personal situations of staff members in order to fully further the interests of the Organization. Managed correctly, we see mobility as the way forward to increase the cohesion of the agency and make it genuinely global. It also has the potential to provide additional opportunities for lateral reassignment and professional growth, particularly if rotation is applied to a broad group of positions, not just international professionals.

6. However, we must review all positions and define the job categories within which mobility or rotation can be considered. Defining and managing such a system will require careful preparation in close collaboration between management and staff representatives. WHO, as a specialized agency, requires a high level of technical expertise for many of its functions. It is therefore essential to identify the positions that are effectively interchangeable, as well as the ones that require special skills to maintain the credibility of the respective programmes.

7. Moving to the subject of the **internal justice systems**, the Staff Associations and the Administration are aware of the current deficiencies, specifically because staff are not protected by local administrative courts. Today we have more than 20 cases in front of the ILO Administrative Tribunal (with a decision awaited for the majority) and more than 50 open at the Headquarters Board of Appeal (HBA). Cases are regularly brought to the attention of the Ombudsperson Office and the Staff Associations, and occasionally to Internal Oversight Services (IOS). The staff psychologist and medical services are approached regularly. Case investigation and resolution still average delays of more than one year. This makes it very difficult for staff to be protected against abuse and for the Organization to promptly detect and correct unethical behaviour, fraud and harassment.

8. In the case of staff at regional and country offices, the delay in appeal processes is even more taxing. The period could extend up to six years. Some regional offices also lack resources and mechanisms for alternative conflict management (ombudsman and psychologist) and counselling. In an effort to review and rectify our internal justice system, we reported last year to the Executive Board that, in conjunction with colleagues from other United Nations agencies, the Staff Associations have proposed to hold a symposium to consider options for internal justice reform that meet United Nations standard criteria.

9. This will include examination of internal and United Nations-wide justice systems, as WHO staff are not protected by local civil jurisdictions. In parallel, the Administration has committed to conducting its own review of our internal justice system, with the participation of staff representatives. The Staff Associations have proposed supporting a similar conference organized by the International Labour Organization in September of 2014 with the purpose of identifying good practices. We hope that the Executive Board will support our Administration in diligently conducting its own review. We appreciate the addition of enhanced administration of justice to the human resources strategy, but we feel it should be included and considered separately from the three areas of programmatic, governance and managerial reforms. Such action would place the conduct of justice apart from WHO's routine administrative and management responsibilities.

10. At the January 2014 session of the Executive Board, we highlighted the serious concerns about the WHO **staff health insurance** (SHI) services. Most notable among these are the lack of local recognition of WHO SHI in health facilities in a number of countries, and the resulting need for major, up-front, cash guarantees. Staff, retirees and dependants in the field are those most acutely affected, and the related hardships of this situation represent a serious risk to health and security when health emergencies arise. We are pleased to report that, since January 2014, the WHO SHI Global Oversight Committee has begun examining the difficulties faced by staff, and has decided to engage external

experts to conduct a comprehensive review of SHI administrative arrangements and recommend improvements.

11. We are confident that this will be a rigorous, fast-moving process and the Staff Associations are committed to work with the Administration to identify the best solutions. In the meantime, we have requested that ad hoc mechanisms be urgently put in place to ensure 24 hour-a-day, 7 day-a-week emergency support from WHO SHI, as well as procedures enabling WHO SHI to provide up-front payment guarantees to health facilities.

12. Beyond WHO, our conditions of service are also affected by the broader framework of the **common United Nations system**. The current review of the compensation package by the International Civil Service Commission will have a profound impact on how we can serve WHO as well as attract new talent. In particular, the Committee has identified the lack of a career development plan which would provide equal opportunities to staff while taking into account the need for diversity and gender balance; the frequently repeated call to do more with less; the increasing use of non-staff contracts; and the lack of succession planning. Members of the Executive Board can provide a strong voice to advocate that the promotion of good practices throughout the UN system provides staff with optimal conditions to deliver on their agencies' missions.

13. Maintaining competitive salaries and benefits is a necessary condition to allow agencies such as WHO to remain competitive, as they try to recruit the best possible people at all levels of the Organization. Salary survey methodologies for locally-recruited staff at non-headquarters duty stations puts some United Nations staff – WHO included – at a disadvantage. This in turn affects United Nations' ability to attract and retain the best people. The current methodologies and their application are not able to capture the evolving realities and, at worst, can produce outcomes that run opposite to the market trend. In such scenarios, not only are the existing staff demoralized, but the United Nations risks and often loses staff to other local entities. On a related topic, staff expect that the pension age (65 years) will be applied to all without further delay, reserving acquired rights to early retirement. We feel that these issues urgently need to be addressed at the level of the United Nations system and we ask for your support.

14. In conclusion, the Staff Associations would like to reiterate their commitment to continued close collaboration with the Administration, our senior management and our governing bodies to modernize and continue improving upon organizational efficiency. We would like to stress the importance of consultation with staff by the Administration and of refraining from presenting any "fait accompli" in the decision process. One way to minimize such a risk is to engage early with staff representatives when important modifications are considered that will affect the conditions of service and staff rights.

15. In summary, we look forward to your support for the aims of fostering a strong and positive managerial culture, safeguarding good employment conditions, salaries and benefits, developing properly managed mobility, recognizing internal justice as an additional pillar to the WHO reform, carrying through the ongoing work on staff health insurance and advocating for good practices within the United Nations system.

16. We would like to close by reiterating that staff believe in the opportunities presented by the reform to enhance the Organization's role as the lead international agency for health matters. We believe in continued respectful dialogue in the pursuit of jointly delivering better health for all people around the world. We thank you for this renewed opportunity to report to the Executive Board and will endeavour to continue providing you with frank and constructive proposals for the future of WHO.

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