



PAN AMERICAN HEALTH ORGANIZATION
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION



150th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Provisional Agenda Item 6.3

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ORIGINAL: SPANISH

STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PAHO/WHO STAFF ASSOCIATION

1. The Staff Association would like to express its gratitude to the members of the Executive Committee of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) for their attention and interest in issues related to current staff working conditions, in accordance with the provisions of the International Civil Service. The staff members of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB) appreciate the confidence the Governing Bodies of the Organization have placed in them. Moreover, they reiterate their commitment to continuing to provide international cooperation in health and fulfilling the mandates of the Organization in accordance with its mission, vision, and values.
2. At this 150th Session of the Executive Committee, the Staff Association would like to review the scope of the relations between the staff and the Administration, particularly with regard to the internal administration of justice, the importance of considering specific actions that will lead to a better organizational climate, and the need to institute formal preventive and alert actions in order to avert dysfunctional behaviors, the escalation of conflicts, and abuse of authority.
3. The Staff Association recognizes that one of the major joint achievements has been the creation of the Integrity and Conflict Management System and institutional recognition of the importance of having such a system in the workplace. In recent months, there has been extensive discussion about options for simplifying processes, making them more efficient, and making sure that the guiding principles of internal justice are duly applied.
4. In this regard, as we indicated in our last statement to the PAHO Executive Committee, it is necessary to address certain gaps that place the Organization at risk and do not instill confidence in the staff that the system or its components are working as they should. We are using as our points of reference the lessons learned by international

institutions that have invested in internal justice systems, the recommendations of the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit, and the findings of a Staff Association survey on the staff's knowledge and use of, and satisfaction with, the services of the Ethics Office and the Office of the Ombudsperson. The following are the main issues that still need to be addressed: (a) PASB does not have a professional investigations service or an internal entity equipped to provide professional guidance for investigations when these services are contracted to third parties. While PASB has an investigations protocol, it is not always strictly applied; (b) there are no mandatory deadlines or time limits at each stage of the conflict management process. As a result, the resolution of cases—particularly those involving workplace or sexual harassment—may take two to three years from the time the initial complaint is lodged; (c) there is no mechanism establishing a mandatory time frame in which to make decisions or implement the recommendations after an investigation has been carried out; (d) no one has been made functionally responsible for educating, disseminating information about, or serving as a reference for exercising the right of appeal. In other words, having contracted an external chair for the Board of Appeals, one would expect that this type of service would be available, yet the Staff Association is alone in providing systematic information to the staff about the exercise of this right; (e) there is no clear division of tasks, roles, and responsibilities among the different entities that make up the internal administration of justice system with respect to policy-making and implementation, application of procedures, analysis, presentation of recommendations, and conflict resolution, which in legal terms and in higher courts is known as a “procedural defect;” (f) the staff of the country offices, regardless of the type of contract or the duration of the assignment, are the most vulnerable to harassment and abuse of authority, which means that it is imperative to prioritize attention to these groups; and finally, (g) the system does not have an oversight or monitoring mechanism that ensures the exercise of this right, due process, or the presentation of systematized information broken down by variables, etc. As a result, the reports issued by the ombudsperson or ethics officer frequently use different categories to describe the same thing, which ultimately does not contribute to an understanding of the real numbers or where the problems are concentrated.

5. Improving strategic planning for our work force and the opportunities for staff development is more relevant than ever. The Organization has a unique opportunity to establish effective mechanisms for timely replenishment of staff with the competencies required for technical cooperation, and investment in human resources development. Such planning will allow staff, both general services and professional, to advance their careers based on their merits, and will limit the hiring of retired staff.

6. Specifically in terms of staff recruitment and selection, we share the concern expressed by the Office of Internal Oversight and Evaluation Services (IES) (Document CE150/23) with respect to short-term contracts. In its words:

IES found very little evidence of competition in the selection of International Consultants. [...] The absence of competition heightened risks of patronage and favoritism. [...] IES also expressed concern that management's intention to eliminate the requirement for advertising all Short Term Professional (STP) and Short Term General Service (STG) positions might reduce competition, not only for these categories of contracts but also, indirectly, for subsequent appointments to fixed-term posts.

7. We would like to remind the members of the Executive Committee that these short-term staff members are regarded as internal candidates when they apply for fixed-term posts. This gives them an advantage over external candidates inasmuch as they are already occupying the post. In addition, the IES has pointed out that a fully competitive hiring process should be applied to all types of PASB contracts including professional and short-term general services staff, in addition to fixed-term posts. The Staff Association has been advocating on this matter for quite some time. Since these short-term employees are considered to be PASB staff, they should undergo the same impartial selection process applied to other fixed-term contracts. Selection panels—a crucial step in validating the impartiality of the recruitment and recommendation process—are used for this purpose. The panels are independent of the offices and include the participation of the Staff Association.

8. The Executive Committee of the Staff Association is committed to working with the Administration on improving the organizational climate. We need to seek ways to motivate the staff and believe that a more participatory management style and increased internal dialogue can contribute to this. We have taken the initiative to work with the Administration on a new system for staff recognition and awards that contributes to greater uniformity and standardization of criteria and practices. It is important to recognize that the purpose is to prevent the discretionary authority of management from prevailing since it has a negative impact on staff. We will also pay particular attention to the Representative Offices, because the staff of those offices have different types of employment agreements. The process for submitting nominations to the recognition and awards system was recently updated and we are pleased to see that an effort has been made to link this type of incentive to the biennial work plans and the performance evaluation system. It is still necessary, however, to fine-tune the criteria for evaluating nominations and the procedures for selecting the winners and for handling exceptions to ensure they are as impartial as possible.

9. As we indicated during the last session of the Executive Committee, we believe it is good practice for the Organization's entities to review their human resources plan when the biennial work plans are reviewed to align the work plan with human/financial resources to achieve the results. The Staff Association believes that just as the design and review of the work plans is a broad and participatory process, the human resources plan should be as well; its review should be transparent and should include different points of view. It is

therefore important that representatives of the Staff Association and all the offices participate in the final review with the Executive Management of PAHO.

10. We wish to work with the Organization on improving the health and well-being of staff and preventing health problems related to stress and lifestyle. The Organization has a formal structure that should attend to the health and well-being of its staff. It also has a staff support service. It therefore came as a surprise when the appointment of PAHO's medical officer was announced in March of this year. This post was never opened up to competition and the normal steps for staff recruitment and selection were not followed. Given the implications this has for the staff and the Organization, we would have expected, at the very least, that a General Information Bulletin would have been issued with information concerning the functions and scope of this post. In addition, it would have been desirable to clearly set out the requirement that this was a bilingual post, as well as its duration, the chain of supervision, the need for confirmation that there was no conflict of interest with a private practice, and the duty to comply with reporting obligations without violating confidentiality. We know that there are extremely competent physicians in the Region with substantial experience in administering corporate medical services who would have been delighted to compete for this post had they been given the opportunity to do so.

11. We would like to emphasize that management posts with corporate responsibility in matters directly related with human resources, conflict management, staff counseling services, well-being, and the like—in particular, human resources management, the Ethics Office, the Office of the Ombudsperson, the internal auditor, the medical service, and staff well-being—should be able to work in English and Spanish. We therefore urge the same strict adherence to this basic prerequisite for working at PAHO that is applied to recruitment for other posts, including general services positions.

12. Finally, we must mention the election process for the new Director of the PASB. Cognizant that this process will usher in a transition period, we declare the commitment of the staff in general, and of the Staff Association in particular, that we all work together to ensure that the process is orderly, adheres to the rules and institutional operations, and does not entail interruptions that are not to Organization's benefit. The Staff Association will fully support reforms that lead to the strengthening and improved performance of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau in its support for the Member States. We also reaffirm our commitment to contributing to the achievement of our Organization's mission.

13. The Staff Association reiterates its willingness and openness to dialogue.

Conclusions

14. The Staff Association respectfully requests that the PAHO Executive Committee consider, endorse, and promote proposals and recommendations related to the matters addressed in this document.

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