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STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PASB STAFF ASSOCIATION

This purpose of the statement by the representative of the Staff Association to the 134th Session of the Executive Committee is to report on the progress of staff-management relations, address the leading issues of interest to the staff, and follow up on some matters presented to the Executive Committee during statements by the Staff Association at previous sessions within this same forum.

The issues addressed in this document are related to the mission of the Staff Association and its role, the recent approval of the PAHO Policy of Prevention and Resolution of Harassment in the Workplace, PASB/WHO human resources, working agreements between staff and the Administration carried out within the framework of the World Council, and the issues discussed at our recent Staff Association Council meeting held on 19 - 24 April 2004, among others.

The Staff Association requests the attention and support of the Executive Committee on the topics addressed in this report.

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Introduction

1. First of all, we wish to thank the members of the Executive Committee for their attention and interest in matters pertaining to human resource administration and management of the Pan American Health Organization, thereby making it possible for the PASB Staff Association to present you with the substantive issues concerning staff and their working conditions, in accordance with what is provided under the International Public Service System.
2. This presentation by the Staff Association to our Governing Bodies goes back to the decision approved at the 80th Session of the Executive Committee in 1978. Although it should be mentioned that the PASB/WHO Staff Association already has 55 years of unfaltering and continuous work under its belt, as an entity with official representation before the Organization's administrative bodies to deliberate on staff matters and that ensures compliance with the working standards and conditions of the staff.
3. We therefore respectfully share with you—members of the 134th Session of the Executive Committee—the progress made in terms of staff-management relations, the leading issues of interest to the staff, and a follow up on some matters presented to the Executive Committee during statements by the Staff Association at previous sessions within this same forum.
4. The Staff Association requests the Executive Committee to support the ideas and proposals contained in this document. This request is put forth with the conviction that upon safeguarding the appropriate working conditions for the staff, the Staff Association contributes to improving the quality of the Organization's services and cooperation with Member States.

On the PASB Staff Association and its Role

5. The primary mission of the Staff Association is to represent PASB/WHO staff: the Organization's most important institutional resource. To this end, the Association must work harmoniously and systematically with all the technical and administrative levels of PAHO/WHO, in order to enforce and apply current regulations, as well as intervene in the consultations and monitoring of new standards and procedures associated with the working conditions of staff recruited by PAHO/WHO.
6. In doing so the Association devotes considerable efforts to improving the representation of the staff within an institutional framework, thereby cooperating with our Administration in the fulfillment of our Organization's mission, which is to contribute to the improvement and national development of the health and health conditions of the peoples of our Region.

7. The Staff Association is established as an institutional agency under Articles 910 and 920 of the Staff Rules.

8. The role of the Staff Association and its delegates is therefore extremely complex, for example:

- a) The Staff Association is the body that represents all PASB/WHO staff, regardless of their contractual status. As mentioned in some of our past statements, the Staff Association did not represent some staff with certain types of contracts because they were not under the regimen of the United Nations system. However, this limitation has since been overcome. In fact, in a recent referendum held within our Association, the body approved the incorporation of new members, and not just those individuals who have a contract under the System. As a result, we have broadly expanded the coverage of our representation.
- b) Our service is voluntary, and we are democratically elected by our membership. To be exact, all the delegates, regardless of their job position within the Organization, must work in their respective offices, serving in accordance with the definitions of their respective work objectives, while also representing the staff working in our Organization. Even though this two-folded undertaking demands both our time and energy, it fills us with satisfaction, because we know that we are making a contribution to our staff, the Organization, and the mandates provided by the Governing Bodies.
- c) All staff delegates or representatives, regardless of what our position within the levels of the Association might be, must learn from practical experience the leadership skills required to appropriately represent and be able to channel the concerns of personnel, as well as the technical aspects of working conditions, such as: wage surveys, classification of positions, appeals, selection and recruitment of personnel, performance evaluations, staff management, pensions, insurance, the rights of staff when faced by adverse measures, etc. As a result, the workload of a delegate, in real terms, is significantly greater than what is truly recognized or made public.
- d) This practical learning experience in the areas of participation, leadership, representation, and the culture of consultation, is not structured, even though we have an excellent system of standards that regulate the task of the Association as a whole, as well as a Code of Ethics. We learn the tasks involved in the role of a delegate by actually doing them and through the ongoing and impartial support of our more experienced delegates. Despite being a good example of capacity building, it does have its disadvantages, since we know that PAHO/WHO

management does have the resources to provide our delegates with structured support so as to strengthen their leadership capacities and skills.

- e) As with the role of the delegates, our members contribute voluntarily to keeping up the activities of the Staff Association and are very respectful of PAHO/WHO institutional mandates.

9. Therefore, in terms of the PAHO/WHO institutional mandates, it is important for the Association to work together with the political and administrative authorities of the Organization to ensure that the Staff Association is able to make a contribution and that it is understood in a positive fashion. To be exact, all the necessary efforts must be put forth and upheld so that our dialogue is characterized by being open, sincere, creative, unaffected by pressures, balanced, and without personal and labor implications. This is the most important part of the PASB/WHO staff-management relations' machinery.

10. We should recall that, in the long run, our main focus is centered on making a positive contribution—through any of our staff positions—to better serving our real employees, i.e., the people of the Americas who determine our working conditions via their elected representatives. The real role of PASB/WHO staff is to make an effort to work towards meeting the commitments agreed to by the PAHO/WHO Governing Bodies and for the sake of Organization's Mission, and do so within the framework of the standards defined by the International Public Service.

Policy against Harassment in the Workplace

11. As stated last year, the policy paper was in its final drafting phase. This year we are pleased to report that we have a Policy of Prevention and Resolution of Harassment in the Workplace, which is already signed and has been in effect since the 1st of May 2004. To date, the Staff Association has already nominated and trained the 12 associate members who will participate on the Panel of Complaints. Likewise, we are waiting for the Administration to finalize the appointment of the other 12 members, and consult with and assign the staff member who will act as Chairman of the Panel of Complaints.

12. We are very pleased to see that after six years of working on this within the Association, PAHO finally has a regulation of this nature that will benefit the Organization as a whole. As you will recall, we reported on this lack of standards in our statement at the 122nd Session of the Executive Committee.

13. In this regard, our Council—the Staff Association's highest authority—welcomes this new standard, gives thanks to the Director for her support, and encourages her to promptly implement the standard in addition to setting up the Panel of the Complaints, as provided under the standard.

14. The selection of the ombudsman or mediator, as others call it, would add to this policy. Although we at the Staff Association recognize that assigning a fixed position to this job is already a step forward, we do believe that the level PAHO has assigned to the position of ombudsman—P4—is not enough to ensure the authority and independence required to investigate, recommend, and generally perform his/her duties to the extent that other ombudsmen/mediators do within the United Nations system, and specifically within WHO, where in all cases the lowest position is a P5, and in some cases, the ombudsman channels his/her working reports through the Governing Bodies.

Human Resources at PAHO/WHO

15. In this section we will highlight the more significant aspects of the reform process underway in human resources management within the system of the international public service, along with other modalities put into practice at PAHO/WHO, that is, issues on the Staff Association's working agenda.

16. As a brief reference, we inform you that basis for our presentation in this section consists of the following: official WHO documents referring to the Reform of Human Resources (107/15 of the WHO Executive Board); results from the five consultations carried out to date within the framework of the Global Staff/Management Council (GSMC)—a working environment where all the Staff Associations from all the WHO Regions and their respective administrations meet to discuss common issues; the PAHO Report on Human Capital from July 2003, which was conducted as a result of one of the working groups set up by the Office of the Director at the beginning of her management period and within the framework of which the Staff Association participated; and the official documents of statements of Staff Association delegates to the different sessions of the Executive Committee, with special mention of the documents dated 1998 to present.

Development of PASB/WHO Human Resources Competencies

17. Within the context of organizational change, a few preliminary steps have been taken in the development of staff competencies in order to be more effective in the delivery of our technical cooperation service. These competencies should be taken into consideration when recruiting and selecting staff, promoting staff and, obviously, when evaluating their performance.

18. Initially, the working group set up during the 2003 transition agreed to a definition of competency, under which a competency is understood as the “combination of abilities, attributes, and behaviors that are directly related to successful, on-the-job performance,” i.e., the elements enabling an individual to know how to act, understand,

and operate, all of which is put into action so as to bring about good performance aimed at meeting a given objective.

19. The discussions and analysis around this matter involved an attempt to identify core competencies and technical competencies for professionals and general services.

20. In turn, we believe that it is pertinent to continue pressing forward with the study and identification of human resource competencies, especially in light of the fact that many of the agencies within the United Nation system are involved in this effort.

21. Nevertheless, the system of competencies can only be developed under certain special conditions in the working environment, since it requires an environment that facilitates communication, action, and resources.

22. In this regard, we believe that, should the organization wish to set up a system of competencies, it should not only involve the efforts of a working group or an office, but it should also be regarded as an institutionalized policy within the Organization. To this end, a good definition of competencies is requested not only for the professional and general service staff, but also for management. We believe that PAHO/WHO management has to develop and incorporate certain competencies to make its work more effective and, in turn, become an effectual promoter of said competencies. This suggestion is the result of the inner reflections we carry out in order to attempt to respond to the question as to why there have been cases of harassment in the workplace. One of the reasons identified was the lack of certain competencies. This could lend itself to a long discussion and calls for a more in-depth debate, but the main idea is that the emphasis be placed on competencies by occupational group, in addition to the characteristics of the responsibilities they cover within the Organization's management.

23. Finally a good map of competencies and an appropriate monitoring of them will help promote a new generation of staff members within PAHO/WHO. In addition, all the necessary support should be provided to staff members who have been working at our Organization for many years so that they may develop the necessary competencies, in the event that they have not already done so. But this is a development that should be meticulously defined at an institutional level.

Career development within the Organization

24. For at least the last 10 years, the different delegates of the Staff Association have made presentations to the members of the Executive Committee in order to address this issue. Thus, in keeping with the previous point, we believe that it will be more feasible for the Organization to build a career development system within the international public service by using the system of competencies.

25. In one of our previous presentations, we shared with you a question referring to how it is possible for true career progress and development to actually take place within the Organization if staff are limited to improving what they already know how to do. Without ruling out the fact that it is desirable to provide training in order to bring current knowledge up to speed, we cannot help but call your attention to the fact that it is much more cost effective to have a career development plan.

26. It is more effective because you pave the way by setting a course of direction with performance standards and specific competencies that are accessible to all staff within the Organization who meet the requirements and who may be promoted as they acquire new aptitudes, experiences, and education. The Organization benefits from this because its staff will be familiar with the institution, shares its values, make a commitment to the scope of the mission, and be encouraged to grow and develop to the point that their competencies will allow them to.

27. For example, it is thus far extremely difficult for a many individuals entering the Organization under the general services category to get promoted into the professional category, despite the fact that they may have a university degree. Here at headquarters, however, and particularly in the administrative offices, there are more opportunities, albeit insignificant, while in the Country Offices it is impossible. But why? Because this is neither established nor included in the standards, and therefore the necessary spaces do not open up.

28. Furthermore, in the past—no more than fifteen years ago—general services was composed primarily of staff members assigned to secretarial tasks or office assistantships. Now, however, given technological development and new generations of intermediate careers, a whole new labor spectrum that cannot be ignored has opened up. Although these individuals are for the most part located in the general services employment category—some are in the first level professional services category—they are not necessarily suitably guided in terms of furthering their development, and as a result they are not in a position to be considered for other jobs or promotions. We are referring to specialty areas such as: the library, web page, information management, project assistance, information technology and programming in general, protocol, research administrators, laboratory workers, course and training specialists, budget programmers, financial analysts, financial specialists in general, and classification specialists, etc. If the Organization were to conduct a real survey today that included three pieces of data such as, position held, main responsibility, and stated profession, we would be surprised to find that there is an entire range of specialties grouped under the job descriptions of secretary, office assistant or office technician. We therefore invite the Organization to conduct a survey on this information that will be helpful in determining what real competencies already exist within the Organization.

29. We are therefore convinced that the conditions we have been promoting for many years now already exist, so that, parallel to the development of competencies, the Organization will also be able to outline a PAHO staff member career plan with specificities broken down by occupational group and place of headquarters.

National Professional Contracts

30. The Human Capital Working Group studied this matter in great detail, and much of the data that we have incorporated in this document are also included in that report. Discussions held within the Staff Association upon launching the initiative to incorporate these staff members into our membership also constitute another important source.

31. It is worth mentioning that the most significant change to the traditional forms of hiring employed by PAHO/WHO occurred in the 80's. In 1983 a decision was adopted to integrate a hiring modality known as National Professionals into the technical cooperation tasks carried out in the Country Offices, thereby taking advantage of the introduction of a new policy springing from within the United Nations system. Officially speaking, the staff administrative standard was issued after the PAHO Directing Council approved it in September 1989.

32. It should be pointed out that this alternative emerges as a response to the need for having skilled professionals to collaborate on limited-duration national projects (usually lasting one to three years) that are for the most part financed with extra budgetary funds. This was a major consideration in the incorporation of national professionals because the temporary nature and financing of it all did not warrant entering a cumbersome process of recruitment and selection of international civil servants for these types of projects, especially because the country already had the national expertise but not necessarily the financial resources to carry out a project.

33. Because of the reduction in financial resources, PAHO/WHO progressively maintained this type of contract over time, in order to cover activities on the regular technical cooperation program, both in the Country Offices and at our specialized centers. To date, it is very likely that said staff represent a third of the total contingent of professional human resources located in our Country Offices and Centers, and that they work with us on technical cooperation and in other areas that sustain the Country Offices operations. It is worth pointing out that this type of hiring does not occur at headquarters.

34. Why do we call your attention to this matter? Because these colleagues of ours, recruited under the National Professionals category, do not receive the same benefits as regular personnel recruited under the United Nations system, which is a fact that they recognize and accept upon signing their contracts. However, they are staff members who work at PAHO/WHO with the same level of commitment, loyalty, and dedication as any

other regular PASB/WHO staff member. Furthermore, by extending this type of contract over time, the Organization has perpetuated a form of recruitment that created a mass of workers that the Organization must consider ethically. That was the thinking that led us at the Staff Association to expand our membership and organize a referendum to amend our Constitution; and we hope to be able to transmit these same ideas to you.

35. We have on payroll some national professionals who have been with PAHO/WHO for ten years or more, in some cases. Our concern is what will happen to them when authorities define a non-renewal of contracts policy that isn't explicit but that instead allows for hiring only under certain conditions. Although there is a certain rationale behind many of the new conditions that are defined for contract renewal, they actually give rise to a real problem; we are dealing with human beings to whom PAHO/WHO gave certain expectations, as a result of its practice of having national professionals or local hires, and then suddenly, without clear information on the matter, it began to disallow this type of hiring, since no one had defined or laid down the ground rules for an organized retirement, relocation, or service termination strategy.

36. This is the situation we are currently facing, which requires a lengthy analysis of the pros and cons of this hiring system. The latter is necessary because, just as a standard was established to authorize this type of hiring as a "pilot study", it is necessary to overhaul said standard, in light of the experience and other elements that we may be able to identify jointly; all of which should lead to an incorporation or reassignment strategy under other employment modalities, if appropriate, for this valuable and intelligent workforce that has been with us for years and that is familiar with our Organization and the technical cooperation, so that we do not lose our colleagues or their expertise and experience.

Short-term Contracts for the Retired

37. One of the human resource-related aspects for which we voice our support together with the PASB/WHO Staff Associations is the persistence in recent times to recruit retired personnel. This practice is also carried out at PAHO/WHO.

38. We believe that this is an issue affecting management in general. Regardless of the fact that many of these retired colleagues have been our peers at some point in life, we feel that, given the well being of the Organization per se and the natural evolution of the institution under a shroud of modernization and change, this type of short-term contracts—which are periodically repeated—do not facilitate institutional development.

39. We believe that the following represent some of the disadvantages brought about by these contracts:

- a) They discourage the staff in question, who are legitimately responsible for a subject, from taking initiative, because these contracts are usually for carrying out tasks that are regular or that should be;
 - b) Although their work experience is valuable, it isn't transferred through these contract systems. We believe that if there is a desire to transfer or recover experience, workshops or meetings may be organized through the PASB Association of Retirees so that these individuals may pass on their experience, collectively within our Organization. We at the Staff Association would be more than pleased to support this initiative; but short-term, periodic contracts are not the best mechanism for passing on experience;
 - c) The roles and responsibilities are not clear. Although the field and scope of the contracts' terms of reference are very clear, the dynamic created by the contracts within the Organization is not productive;
 - d) Finally, the transfer of experience, which is the grounds for maintaining these contracts, does not take place throughout the entire area or unit to which the retired individual is assigned.
40. The Staff Association calls your attention to this matter.

Access to Appointment by Service established under Staff Regulations 420.1 and Manual II.5.590-670

41. When we began making a greater effort within PAHO to align ourselves with WHO, with regard to both technical and administrative aspects, one of the results was the opportunity for PAHO professional staff members to be transferred to positions within WHO.
42. Some of our staff members who had been working at PAHO for several years had attained their appointments by service, in accordance with the rules, that is, their contracts were for five years as opposed to two years.
43. Their contracts were extended in keeping with provisions under our staff regulations. However, upon being transferred to WHO, the right that they had acquired was not taken into consideration because of some unforeseen circumstance provided under WHO staff regulations. As a result, they had to regain their right to an appointment by service. This only happens to professional staff transferred from the Region of the Americas to WHO.

44. This matter should be discussed at the level of both PAHO and WHO Administrations, as it represents a real obstacle for the turnover and mobility of PASB staff to other WHO regions and vice versa.

Code of Conduct

45. Since the year 2000, the Staff Association has recommended studying the development of a Code of Conduct for PAHO/WHO, with a view to strengthening the best human qualities and preventing the free interpretation of what is expected from PASB/WHO staff members, the scope of their responsibilities, and the limits of their actions.

46. In this regard, a number of developments that warrant recognition have emerged. At the initiative of the Office of the Director, the Human Capital Working Group was put in charge of carrying out a proposal regarding the area of Ethics and Labor Relations. After nearly six months of work, the Group defined a proposal that we expect will lay the groundwork for continual joint efforts on a Code.

47. At the same time, as part of our framework of activities with the GSMC, a discussion of this matter was planned for our 2003 annual meeting, in keeping with a proposal put forth by all WHO Staff Associations. Another issue for discussion was the definition of a Mixed Board of Discipline, as other UN agencies and organizations have already established. This discussion has been postponed until this upcoming GSMC.

Harmonization and Alignment with WHO

48. As we pointed out in previous paragraphs, a meeting known as the WHO Global Staff Management Council (GSMC) is held with the staff associations of all WHO regions and their respective administrations. Matters of interest to both parties regarding working conditions are discussed at this meeting.

49. Last year marked the celebration of the 5th GSMC, where vital issues were addressed in light of the fact that WHO has a new Director-General who has put forth a series of proposals such as, decentralization, strengthening of the policy of personnel rotation and mobility between regions, etc.

50. Last year, after these five global meetings had been held, we came forward with clearer terms of reference on the scope and depth of these meetings. Another matter in which WHO Staff Associations and, specifically, the PAHO Staff Association had invested a great deal of effort also came to light at that meeting, to wit, an agreement aimed at building a partnership so that both staff and management may share the

commitment of ensuring that the Organization appropriately, transparently, and successfully carry out its mission.

51. In that sense it is very important for us to have shared values and principles that will regulate and guide our staff-management relations and dialogue. The Director-General of WHO and the recent World Health Assembly have approved these principles, along with the new terms of reference for the Councils.

52. We view this approval more as an effort to harmonize and positively align our actions, particularly in light of our responsibilities as staff representatives. Likewise, the Staff Associations have reached an agreement to continue being widespread organizations that are always on line in terms of communications, and that finally incorporate the use of video conferences, among other technologies, to monitor agreements, promote the sharing of experiences, and foster the search for common solutions to common problems, and collective support.

53. The principles regulating staff-management relations are contained in the Report of the 5th GSMC and will be distributed to our delegates. We likewise request that they be distributed to management, so that we may begin the process of incorporating said principles into our daily dialogue.

Other Matters of Importance

54. We continue to be concerned with *security matters*. We realize that substantial progress has been made at the PAHO/WHO Country Office level in order to meet the standards set forth under the United Nations framework; however, it is difficult to ensure the safety of locally recruited staff in those offices. In this regard, we continue to encourage and urge the Administration to take all the necessary steps so that these staff members and their families do not remain unprotected.

55. The *wages survey* for general services staff belonging to the United Nations system and located in our countries were conducted throughout the entire Region of the Americas in 2004-2005. The interagency wage committees that are made up of members from the Staff Association and the Administration carried out this exercise. Our Federation of International Civil Servants' Association (FICSA) has begun setting up two workshops in order to train the staff association personnel participating in these exercises. One of these workshops will be held in Chile while the other one will take place in Mexico. We at the Staff Association have already selected the delegates who will be participating in the workshops, and we are funding their participation. We do believe, however, that it would be important for the administration to take advantage of this training opportunity, so that administrative staff may also access the training on this methodology through the country offices. Costs corresponding to the course and

participation by the administration's representatives should be covered by their respective Country Offices or by PAHO/WHO administration.

56. As to *hiring for positions with managerial responsibility*, we think that it is important to standardize the appointment and designation of PAHO/WHO managers. Based on the results of a brief study conducted on the matter, we have observed that not necessarily all the managerial positions are filled in keeping with a selection process, including the publication of the vacant position. As a result of this, and in order to ensure that our managers meet the minimal recruitment standards, as required for any other position within the Organizations, we call your attention to this matter.

Conclusions

- The PASB Staff Association thanks the members of the Executive Committee for their attention, and for ensuring that our voluntary, collective, and ongoing efforts are aimed at securing better performance by the Organization as a whole.
- Our work relations in the various areas that we have pointed out to the Executive Committee members are continual, active, and constructive. We are certain that we make a contribution to improving the working conditions of PASB/WHO staff members, and thus to the quality of technical cooperation services.
- In the same spirit of the recently WHO-approved principles that guide staff-management relations, we hope that our dialogue with PAHO Management continues to be open, full of wisdom, and marked by mutual respect and honesty for the good of the personnel and the Organization.

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