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STATEMENT BY THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PAHO/WHO STAFF ASSOCIATION

1. The PAHO/WHO Staff Association would like to thank the Members of the Executive Committee for their interest in matters related to current staff working conditions in accordance with the provisions of the international civil service. On behalf of the staff, we reiterate our commitment to the mandates of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB). Likewise, we would like to note that the Staff Association maintains the same spirit of work with Executive Management, in addition to contributing toward good managerial performance by promoting organizational values in a respectful work environment.

2. This statement, as an elected representative of the Staff Association, is given after an extensive consultation process with staff representatives stationed at the PAHO/WHO country offices and Pan American Centers. The topics have been summarized into four strategic priorities: *a)* the Human Resources Strategy; *b)* Staff Health and Well-Being; *c)* Zero-Tolerance Culture on Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment; and *d)* the Internal Justice System.

Human Resources Strategy

3. Worth highlighting are the efforts the Department of Human Resources Management is making to evaluate the selection process of permanent and temporary staff, seeking to not only shorten recruitment and selection times, but also to optimize the process and be able to attract and recruit talent that can adapt to the needs of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO).

4. In that sense, the Staff Association believes that, based on the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, some measures that have yielded positive results, such as teleworking, should continue. This modality has proven effective and provides the opportunity of a better work/life balance. The Staff Association has no objection to this modality being strengthened by the inclusion of: *a)* practical measures to monitor the achievement of goals; and *b)* assistance from the Department of Human Resources Management to managers or staff members who need to talk about how they can telework effectively.

5. Of equal priority within the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic is to determine which institutional areas require permanent staff and which require some flexibility in this regard because they are designed to respond to short-term situations or to achieve specific public health outcomes.

6. Another lesson learned in human resources management has been the strengthening of performance reviews. The use of this tool and its evaluation process should be reconsidered so as to link it to personnel-related decisions, such as reclassifications, staff rotation, awards or recognitions and, especially, learning or improving knowledge of certain skills. In general, performance reviews should strengthen the capacity of managers or supervisors to work in a rational, coherent, and transparent manner. We would all benefit from setting the goal of not only conducting performance evaluation at the organizational level, but also training supervisors in human resources management, emotional intelligence, prevention of unconscious bias, and the prioritization of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), with a view to closing gender gaps throughout the organization.

Staff Health and Well-being

7. Personnel and staff have demonstrated commitment to PAHO's mandates and objectives and have adapted to the new work arrangements. We welcome the efforts to prioritize and give visibility to mental health as an integral part of staff well-being. We are committed to supporting structural preventative measures and strengthening access to services that promote mental, psychological, and emotional well-being, especially in duty stations where those services are not readily available. In this regard, we welcome the creation of the post of Staff Counsellor in the Health and Welfare Unit. There is no health without mental health, and we must walk the talk.

Zero-Tolerance Culture on Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment

8. The Staff Association strongly condemns all forms of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH) and gender-based violence, and stresses that, when experienced in the workplace, they constitute a human rights violation and a serious attack against the person.

9. We welcome the firm commitment and all efforts by the Director of PASB to prevent sexual exploitation and abuse and to investigate allegations of harassment and sexual harassment. The World Health Organization (WHO) has allocated resources for activities to prevent SEAH, which will fund at least two professional positions in the Region of the Americas.

10. We again stress that more awareness and dialogue are needed, especially considering the diverse cultural and sociodemographic factors that characterize our work environment. We can achieve an even safer workplace if we create additional informal structures to help break the silence when addressing issues related to sexual harassment, as victims may not always feel comfortable using existing, formal channels. In this respect, we would welcome an active bystander campaign.

Internal Justice System

11. The Staff Association supports the efforts of the Director of PASB to strengthen efficiency, transparency, and accountability and to build performance indicators to monitor progress. In that regard, the Staff Association has taken up the staff's concern that a complete review be undertaken of what is now known as the conflict resolution and integrity system. Almost 20 years after the establishment of this system and considering the progress PAHO has made in improving transparency, the Staff Association believes that institutional responsibilities regarding integrity, the organizational response to conflict resolution, and mechanisms allowing this to be timely and fair should be more clearly delineated.

12. The conflict resolution system is designed to provide processes and mechanisms that staff can access and use to file complaints or manage conflicts. To this end, the relevance of certain of its services must be reviewed, and this review must be flexible and innovative. In this regard, we propose that the current Integrity and Conflict Management System be restructured, and its terms of reference amended to focus primarily on conflict resolution.

13. We believe it would be relevant to further investigate the WHO model to achieve better management and monitoring of compliance with deadlines by the various entities involved in the formal conflict resolution process. WHO has an Internal Justice Unit within the Department of Human Resources to fulfill this function. There are vital entities involved in this process, such as the PAHO Board of Appeal, that require regular maintenance to ensure their proper functioning. Some of the maintenance tasks for these entities include: renewing or electing their members; supporting training of staff members in the exercise of their right to appeal administrative decisions and case closures; placing more emphasis on preventive and informal measures to solve problems in the workplace; making policies related to conflict resolution more accessible and consistent; and publishing a unified annual report on PAHO's internal justice system.

14. In that regard, the Staff Association will participate in this reform effort in the best constructive spirit. However, we should be mindful that the Staff Association cannot take years to conduct this review, since it must also identify the resources needed for the conflict resolution role to be performed properly, some of which are associated with prevention, others with mediation, and so on, at each stage of the conflict resolution process.

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