

WFP Professional Staff Association (PSA) Statement to the Executive Board, Rome, 21 June 2018

Mister President,
Distinguished Members of the Board,
Mister Executive Director,
UGSS Colleagues,
WFP Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Professional Staff Association (PSA) is honoured to be invited once again to address the WFP Executive Board. The PSA intervention is now an established feature of the June board which we consider a key venue to discuss the progress made by WFP and the challenges ahead of us as an ever-expanding global organisation.

The WFP Professional Staff Association is the official worldwide voice of professional staff, national and international. We promote and safeguard the rights, interests and welfare of our colleagues wherever they are in the world. To better serve our staff, we are a leading member of the Coordinating Committee for International Staff Unions and Associations (CCISUA), representing over 60,000 staff from 17 UN organisations, including UNICEF, UNHCR and UN Headquarters.

At WFP, we enjoy a good relationship with management based on a robust consultation and communication process through the Staff Management Council chaired by the Deputy Executive Director, Amir Abdulla. The Human Resources Division Director John Aylieff and his team are often our main interface for policy review and feedbacks. We are committed to enhancing this dialogue with regular meetings with the Executive Director, whenever possible. The PSA has always welcomed direct contact with higher management and more frequent all staff meetings.

Erosion of Conditions of Service

WFP is currently dealing with the highest number of large scale emergencies throughout the world: in Syria, Yemen, Bangladesh, Iraq, Central Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo, to name a few. Everywhere WFP staff, our

colleagues, are on the frontline of WFP humanitarian response, working 24/7, rain or shine, often in perilous and difficult conditions, far away from friends and family.

Our Executive Director, who has visited dozens of WFP operations, members of the Executive Board during field visits, have all witnessed the dedication of WFP staff. They never leave until the last person is served. They have to be reminded, many times, that their life, their health and their wellbeing are as important as fulfilling WFP mandate.

Until two years ago, our staff in hardship duty stations could concentrate on their work and worry less about the families they were leaving behind, often on short notice, in a previous duty-station or nearby country. But since 2016, their conditions of service have declined drastically with the phasing out of the Special Operation Living Allowance (SOLA) and the Administrative Place of Assignment (APA).

Today, many staff are finding it difficult to pay for expenses in their duty station and for the cost of keeping a family in a different location. With the abolishment of the APA, many staff, coming from places like Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, South Sudan or other countries at war, do not even know where to settle their families when they are reassigned to hardship duty stations. Some even had to seek refugee status to secure a stable household for their families.

If today WFP is recognised as the leading frontline humanitarian agency, it is mainly because it can rely on an extremely dedicated and very mobile workforce. But with the long list of recent cuts to their compensation packages, SOLA, accelerated home leave, installation of families in nearby duty-stations, education travel and reduced education grant, staff may become more reluctant to relocate when the organisation needs it most. There is no doubt that these changes to mobility-related benefits will affect WFP ability to fulfil its mandate.

Staff in non-hardship duty-stations have also seen pay cuts due to the introduction of new elements in the post adjustment calculation methodology with cuts as high as five percent in Geneva.

There is now a growing dissatisfaction of staff around the world about their working conditions and remuneration. In February this year, UN staff launched a day of action to voice their grievances, from the most remote to the largest duty stations, from Bangkok to Baghdad, from Juba to Geneva. In March, UN staff in Geneva went on strike, followed by staff in other agencies and duty stations.

It seems the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) might respond positively to some of the staff issues with a review of the classification of hardship duty stations and the post-adjustment calculation methodology.

Locally Recruited Staff and Temporary Staff

The degradation of working conditions is also affecting our locally recruited colleagues, the backbone of WFP, who are now facing uncertain times with the multiplication of staffing structure reviews throughout the world while WFP is adapting its workforce to the needs of the Integrated Road Map process. The PSA is working with WFP Management to ensure a fair treatment for staff that are not retained.

It is also important to prevent the misuse of short term contracts, SSA and SCs, in country offices, regional bureaux and Headquarters. We commend WFP for the recent lifting of the hiring of general staff and we hope that the organisation will look at the situation of the several hundred consultants employed in Rome and elsewhere, especially those who have served WFP for more than four years.

We are pleased that WFP has strengthened its policies that prohibit harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority. At several occasions, this year, the Executive Director sent strong messages to all staff but we still see that not everybody in some regional or country offices is paying due notice. We hope that the recently created joint WFP-Executive Board committee on harassment, sexual harassment, abuse of power, and discrimination will report to the Board on measures and actions implemented in those areas both for staff and for beneficiaries.

The PSA provides support to staff who face harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority. We have also been working with the Human Resources Division to reinforce existing policies. We are glad that WFP has reasserted that it has zero tolerance for abusive conduct. We need all United Nations organizations to take similar actions and we hope that a single framework to eliminate harassment and abuse of authority in all its forms from the common system workplace will be adopted by the UN.

The PSA would like also to thank the Executive Director for the expansions to WFP's health coverage for our consultants, short-term International Professional staff, and short-term General Service staff in headquarters and WFP Offices. The new enhancements to the medical coverage for these categories include coverage for pregnancy-related medical expenses and delivery and 16 weeks of paid compensation for pregnancy.

Mandatory Age of Separation MAS 65

Last year we brought to the attention of the Executive Board the lack of information on the implementation by WFP of the UN General Assembly

resolution to extend to 65 years the mandatory age of separation of staff recruited before 1 January 2014. We are pleased to see that WFP has taken at heart our request and implemented the resolution through individual waivers to staff during the past months and, following the recent approval by the FAO Council, is fully adopting the new Mandatory Age of Separation.

There are still areas that we consider in need of improvements such the reassignment and promotion processes where there is need to ensure a fair and equal treatment for all staff. The PSA notes the introduction of the Talent Pool and Fit Pool as tools for the selection of potential candidates for vacant reassignment positions. We hope that these new tools will not hinder progress towards a more equal and diverse workforce.

It is also “work in progress” for a better space allocation at HQ to tackle overcrowding and for the commissary for which a replacement model is still to be sought.

Please allow me to conclude by thanking the Executive Board and WFP Executive Director for giving the Professional Staff Association the opportunity to speak before your distinguished assembly and share with you issues that matter the most to WFP staff.