PRESENTATION OF THE STAFF ASSOCIATION TO THE COMMITTEE ON ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUDGETARY AFFAIRS (CAAP)

(April 2013)

Chairman, distinguished delegates, on behalf of the Staff Committee I’d like to thank the Working Group on the Review of OAS Programs of the Committee on Administrative and Budgetary for bringing us together to share the insights and perspective of the staff on document CAAP/GT/RVPP-182/13 Rev. 7 considered in the framework of the mandate issued in resolution AG/RES. 1 (XLIII-E/12).

This invitation, extended to the Association to present to the Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Affairs, represents the continuation of a long institutional tradition of convening staff of the Organization to participate and be heard in different areas of decision making. In that spirit then, and on behalf of the Staff of the General Secretariat, we present our perspective and explanation of the reasons for disagreement with the proposed changes, with the hope that it will serve as input for the consideration of Member States in the decision making on human resources and its regulatory framework.

**Considerations**

After analyzing the changes proposed in the document, and considering formal discussions within the Working Group on issues tangentially related to the proposed changes to Chapter III of the General, the Staff Association:

1. Fully agrees on the need for a change in the management of Human Resources of the General Secretariat, and believes it necessary to carry out a thorough and detailed analysis of the more challenging aspects in the proper management and administration of Human Resources.
2. Also agrees on the importance of staff recruitment conducted through mechanisms that favor the selection based on open competition based on qualification, but also must ensure mobility, promotion and retention of qualified staff.
3. Shares the vision of the member states on the importance of training in staff development and emphasizes the need to include measures that further develop aspects such as career planning, retention incentives as well as to earmark the needed budgetary resources for effective implementation.

However, we consider it necessary to express our concerns over:

1. The inconsistent application of rules in force has led to the mistaken perception that there is a need to change them in order to achieve enforcement as well as a transparent and efficient administration.
2. The measures taken to streamline administrative processes and management of human resources in the General Secretariat should not be contrary to the basic principles of international and labor laws, or human rights. The respect of principles such as non-retroactivity of the law, which adversely affects staff, respect for agreements previously reached and ensuring equal treatment and equal benefits for all staff should not result in greater precariousness of the labor force.

**Considerations on the Merits of the Proposed Changes**

 In resolution AG/RES. 1 (XLIII-E/12) item 6 asks the General Secretariat to, *include in the Comprehensive Human Resource Management Strategy clear objectives, concrete and measurable results, and specific criteria for its implementation and evaluation and ensure that it reflects a medium- and long-term vision for recruitment and selection, training, and retention of qualified staff*. From the perspective of staff, a PowerPoint presentation that includes a series of proposals does not make a "Comprehensive Human Resources Strategy" of an Organization of the importance and scope of the OAS which manages more than 2000 individuals and works in a multinational and multicultural context.

 The presentation lacks clear objectives, concrete, measurable results and specific criteria for its implementation and evaluation. Additionally, it does not reflect a medium or long term vision for the recruitment and selection process, training or retention of qualified personnel. It also differs from the changes proposed by the member states for Chapter III of the Staff Rules, in terms of recruitment and selection process, type of contract and job classification, to name a few. The foregoing demonstrates a disconnect between the regulatory framework and the Human Resources "Strategy" that it is meant to support.

 Furthermore, if the proposal is approved as presented it would have negative short and long term effects, not only for staff, but for the Organization as a whole:

1. **Deepen and strengthen different treatment of Staff:** despite entering through competition some will receive better benefits than others (Series A or Series B), or have no access to Series B or Continuing Contracts considering that this decision will be the prerogative of an official and will facilitate unequal treatment and greater discretion. [**Ref:** **Arts. 19, 20, 21, 23 y 44**]
2. **Violate the agreement on parity with the United Nations:** the pay scale as well as the system and job classification methods are an integral part of contracts, the unilateral modification of terms, removing guarantees of an audit before the assignment of additional functions and incorporating differing aspects and methods from UN standards, are a violation of the terms of the contract and the mutually agreed system in place. [**Ref:** **Arts. 38 y 44**].
3. **Precarious contractual terms**: as a result of the reduction of severance and benefits, inclusion of new conditions for access to better benefits as well as the elimination of certain guarantees for mobility and reemployment.
4. **Place the Organization at a disadvantage with other Organizations**: less favorable contractual terms will make it more difficult to attract qualified personnel.
5. **Negatively affect transparency in the selection process**: by drastically modifying the participation of the Staff Association in the selection process.
6. **Will result in mass layoffs**: either by not including the funding of posts in the Series A, Series B or Continuing Contracts financed with specific funds, or by conditioning the continuity of staff positions through competition but staff are unable to compete due to reasons beyond their control. This will lead to malaise and imminent and serious workplace disputes.
7. **Will unduly penalize staff**: eliminates opportunities for improvement, disregards performance evaluation appeal mechanisms, hinders access to greater job stability and benefits.
8. **Will ignore basic principles of law**: the retroactive application of the proposed changes to the General Standards negatively impacts the terms of the contract and disregards previously held agreements.

If the changes are approved, the resulting situation will add to the pressure that staff must face year after year due to systematic job cuts, loss of institutional memory and budget adjustments. It is necessary to consider other measures, such as increased quotas, to cope with statutory increases, and alleviate the growing stress on the staff.

The Staff of the General Secretariat of the OAS perform identical work to that of other international organizations, we are equally qualified and have a unique commitment to work in even the most adverse situations. Why do we deserve fewer benefits, less training and more precarious contracts? Is our region less important? Is the promotion of democracy, the promotion and defense of human rights, integral development, and the promotion of peace in the region less noble or trivial goals that require employees with the same characteristics and preparation? OAS Staff are convinced that the answer to these questions would be in the negative.

**Final Thoughts**

The Staff Committee reiterates its willingness to work with the Secretariat and member states and reaffirms the unconditional commitment of the staff to the Organization and its goals. It is convinced that the magnitude of the proposed changes merits that relevant and necessary studies be carried out, starting with an analysis of the needs, before embarking on a reform of this nature, and to consider the effects and implications for the Organization and its staff.

 Furthermore, we strongly believe that adherence to the rules in force and existing agreements will result in an efficient use of resources, especially given the budgetary constraints of the current situation. In addition it will provide for a committed and motivated workforce with clear prospects for career development within the Organization. The staff are partners and not petitioners in the Organization, we are the most important resource and we will continue to be ready to work for the benefit of the Organization and the citizens of the Americas, in a framework of mutual respect.