

OAS STAFF ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STAFF COMMITTEE 2013-2014 July 2013 – July 2014

I. INTRODUCTION

The 2013-2014 Staff Committee is pleased to inform staff members of the OAS General Secretariat of the work that has been carried out during its time in office. This document gathers the details of the activities carried out by the Staff Committee and by the representatives of the Joint Committees on which there is staff representation.

The Committee held twenty-three formal meetings and several informal meetings during the course of the year.

The 2013-2014 Staff Committee was made up of Michael Thomas, President; Luis Villalobos, Vice President; Jan Astaphan, Treasurer; Steven Griner, Secretary; Martha Beltran, Pro-Secretary; Joel Andrews, Pro Treasurer; members Patricia Quiroz and Cecilia Martins, and alternate Sheyla Carvalho. Beverly Wharton-Lake and Carla Sorani were the Representative and Alternate Representative, respectively, on the Retirement and Pension Fund Committee. The Committee was also supported administratively by Alicia Pita from July – December, 2013, and by Rocio Tamara Garicoche from January to July, 2014.

II. ACTIVITIES & AREAS OF CONCERN

In fulfillment of its functions, the Staff Committee placed particular emphasis on ensuring that the decisions and measures adopted by the Secretariat in relation to staff members respect the rules in force and are applied in a transparent and consistent manner. Similarly, the Committee worked on disseminating information of interest to staff members.

Among the principal activities carried out and results achieved in priority areas, the following are highlighted:

i. Proposed modification to the General Standards:

The 2013-2014 Staff Committee, continued to closely follow the debate in the CAAP on the Proposed Modification to the General Standards. To this end, members of the Committee attended the CAAP meetings at which this issue was discussed. In addition, the Staff Committee was able to actively participate in the above meetings, in order to explain the position of the Staff Association with respect to the possible impact of the

proposed modification on the rights of GS/OAS personnel. This followed a series of meetings held with various OAS Permanent Missions in order to impress upon them the importance of hearing and taking the rights and concerns of staff into consideration as part of any modification of rules, and particularly rules that affect personnel.

In addition, the Committee worked closely with the Administration, particularly with the Chief of Staff of the Secretary General, the Department of Legal Services, and the Department of Human Resources to draft a joint proposal which was presented to the Member States in October, 2013.

This joint proposal is one of the documents under consideration by Member States in the framework of the CAAP and its working groups. After many meetings and discussions, the Member States decided to postpone any decision on modification of the General Standards until after the General Assembly, with a view to adopting changes at the Special General Assembly to be held in October of this year.

The Staff Association held two Informative Sessions (November, 2013 & May, 2014) to, among others, update staff on the status of the Modification of the General Standards and present the joint proposal made to the Member States by the Staff and the Administration.

Through the *Staff News*, the Committee informed staff of the documents being discussed by the CAAP and which had implications for staff, in order to maintain staff members informed of the negotiations and with a view to continued improvement of channels of communication.

ii. Representation of the interests of staff members in relation to cases of workplace harassment, differential treatment, performance evaluations, competitions, terminations and post audits:

The Staff Committee provided advice, support and personal attention to staff members, through dozens of individual consultations received on work-related issues. It also accompanied and provided advice to staff members in meetings with the General Secretariat to address specific situations.

Additionally, the Committee designated staff members to participate in the various Joint Committees with the Administration. The results of the activities of these committees can be found in Item III below.

Specifically with respect to the existing policies on workplace and sexual harassment, and in response to various incidents of alleged harassment that were brought to the Committee's attention, the Committee drafted letters to the Department of Human Resources requesting training in the areas of work and sexual harassment for all OAS personnel. In a meeting that the Committee requested with the Director of the

Department of Human Resources, it was agreed that in the second half of 2014, a committee to review current policies in these two areas would be created, which would draw upon the talents of staff members with expertise in the area, and that training would be provided for all GS/OAS personnel, together with an awareness-building campaign on the subject.

iii. Strategic Vision of the OAS:

The Committee requested a meeting with the Chair of the Permanent Council Working Group on Strategic Vision, Ambassador Emilio Rabasa of Mexico, in order to discuss the manner in which the Staff Association can best contribute to the ongoing Strategic Vision Process. Ambassador Rabasa indicated that he would welcome input from the Staff Association.

Pursuant to this, the Staff Committee attended Permanent Council and Working Group meetings on the subject and based upon those discussions, the Committee determined that one of the best ways for the Association to contribute to the process was not in the stage of defining the priorities of the OAS, but in the later stages where more specific input would be most useful, such as Human Resources and Management reform, which is scheduled to take place in the second half of 2014.

iv. Management Modernization at the OAS:

The Staff Committee met on several occasions with Mr. Julian Murray, a consultant who is working with the Administration on Management Modernization, in order to discuss issues that should be taken into account in the modernization efforts, including, among others, respect for staff rights.

v. The “conversion” of staff members to CPR’s, and the termination of continuing contract holders:

In December, 2013, GS/OAS notified several staff members in the national offices that their long term contracts would not be renewed or that their continuing contract would be terminated, respectively. The President of the Staff Association requested a meeting with the Secretary General to discuss the matter, at which time the Secretary General indicated that the situations of each of the affected staff members could be assessed on a case by case basis, so as to minimize the potential impact of the terminations, i.e., pension ramifications, etc. Nonetheless, subsequent discussions with various representatives of the Administration did not lead to any modification to the initial December, 2013 termination decisions. Several of these individuals continue to provide similar services to GS/OAS through CPR contracts. The Staff Committee wishes to express its grave concern regarding this practice.

The Staff Committee is similarly concerned about involuntary contract terminations related to continuing contract holders that have taken place over the past year. Although these terminations have been few in number, the Staff Committee considers that in some of these situations, the functions that were carried out by the respective posts will continue, if not the actual post, notwithstanding the fact that according to the rules in force, continuing contracts should only be terminated for cause or when a post is abolished.

vi. Research on CPR membership in International Organization Staff Associations and GS/OAS Survey: (PENDING)

Following inquiries by staff members and CPR's, and in light of the considerable number of CPR's that work at GS/OAS, the Staff Committee researched the status of CPR membership in several international organizations, including the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Pan American Health Organization, and the Inter-American Development Bank.

In addition, the Staff Committee sent a brief survey to the GS/OAS staff and CPR's, in order to gauge opinions on the possibility of offering CPR's some sort of membership or associate membership in the staff association.

GS/OAS internal rules were also reviewed, leading to the conclusion that inclusion of CPR's as members in the Staff Association would require (i) modification of the Statutes of the Staff Association, which would in turn require the approval of the Staff Assembly and the Secretary General; (ii) modification of the General Standards, which can only be modified by the Member States; and (iii) that the crux of the problem lies with the misuse/abuse of CPR contracts.

A summary of the research conducted, the survey results, and the conclusions arrived at were presented at the May, 2014 Informative Session, and are also available on the Staff Association website.

vii. Regularization of the contractual situation of staff members: competitions (expired short term contracts, reclassifications and the competition for continuing contracts):

There continue to be a large number of staff members whose contractual conditions are irregular, according to the standards currently in force. In this sense, the Committee requested that the Secretary for Administration and Finance, as well as the Department of Human Resources, publish the list of staff members eligible to enter into continuing contracts, as well as open the continuing contract process.

With respect to competitions for long-term contracts, over the past year, 69 competitions of this nature have been presented to the Advisory Committee on Selection and Promotion, on which the Staff Association has representation.

While this has gone a long way to reducing the backlog in pending competitions, in recent months the pace of competitions has slowed, and therefore, we are returning to a situation which, if not corrected, will lead to yet another tremendous backlog of pending and overdue competitions.

With respect to the continuing contract process, throughout the past year, the Staff Committee sent various letters and emails to the former Secretary for Administration and Finance and the Acting Director of the Department of Human Resources, requesting the publication of the eligibility list and the opening of the process, considering that GS/OAS is under the target percentage. On February 27, 2014, DHR published the eligibility list. Similarly, on July 9, 2014, DHR published an updated eligibility list and indicated that the continuing contract process would be opened in October, 2014.

viii. Dissemination of information among members of the staff association:

The Committee used different means to communicate with Staff, particularly the Staff News, in order to disseminate information about specific situations that directly affect staff members and inform them of their rights and obligations.

ix. Relations with member states:

Courtesy visits were made by members of the Staff Association to 10 Permanent Missions to the OAS to discuss the proposed changes to Chapter III of the General Standards and other issues of concern to staff.

As a result of these efforts, the Staff Association was invited to attend and participate in various meetings of the CAAP Working Groups discussing issues of importance to staff members.

Additionally, members of the Staff Committee maintained a presence in decision-making fora, General Assembly (GA), the Permanent Council (PC) and the CAAP.

x. Coordination with other Staff Associations of International Organizations & FICSA:

The Staff Committee participated in a meeting of the Federation of International Civil Servants' Association (FICSA) with its President, Mauro Pace and members of the Staff Associations of other International Organizations. The President of the Staff Association also participated in meetings with the Presidents of other D.C. based International Organizations. In addition, the Committee also contacted other International Organizations in the Washington area to identify new benefits and joint services.

xi. Actions of the staff committee with the General Secretariat:

Meetings were held with the Secretary General, the Assistant Secretary General, the Judges of the OAS Administrative Tribunal, the Chief of Staff of the Secretary General, and the Directors of the Department of Legal Services and the Department of Human Resources, among others, on various topics.

Letters and e-mails were submitted to the competent authorities and published in relation to the delays in the continuing contract process, the competition process for long-term contracts, performance evaluations, and the criteria used to determine terminations, staff reductions, procedures to be followed in cases of harassment, the order of priority of competitions, and budgetary reductions, among others.

III. JOINT COMMITTEES AND WORKING GROUPS

The Joint Committees continued their functions. The Staff Committee is grateful for the commitment and work of the staff representatives in the Joint Committees. Additionally, the Staff Committee progressed in following up on the labor of the working groups created to attend to specific matters of interest to staff. What follows are the issues that should be noted:

i. Joint Committee on Parking

The Parking Fund is in a healthy state, as it has sufficient resources to handle the recurring costs and the projected annual costs; as of the end of 2013 the fund balance was of \$420,148. As a result, it was not necessary to increase the premiums in 2013.

During the period July 2013 to July 2014, nineteen (19) people gained access to the GSB parking lot and four (4) to the ADM parking lot. Additionally, the number of people using Colonial Parking decreased from 35 in July 2013 to 31 at present.

ii. Joint Committee Medical Benefits Trust Fund

During the 2013-2014 period the Medical Benefits Trust Fund had a positive return of 16.1%. This percentage is greater in comparison with the ideal investments portfolio, which gained 14.1%.

This was due to the difference in the performance of the mutual funds, which could be imitated and improved upon, in comparison to the market reference point that is being followed.

The cash flow continues to be positive, one of the premises that was emphasized by the actuaries, in order to be able to maintain and comply with the actuarial situation and with the annual increases in the premiums, co-paid by the employees and the Secretariat.

Expenses went down slightly compared to last year.

An audit of Blue Cross, Blue Shield claims is going to be carried out.

iii. Joint Insurance Committee

During the year under review ending June 30, 2014 the committee came together on about 5 occasions for working meetings, conference calls and presentations. Representatives of the committee are also invited to participate in meetings of the committee that oversees the OAS Medical Benefits Trust Fund. In summary form, the following issues are noteworthy.

- The contract for the administration of the self-insured plan currently administered by BC/BS is up for renewal in 2014 and a bidding process is currently in progress. A consulting company is currently preparing the Request For Proposal (RFP) documents for potential bidders and will be responsible for evaluating prospective administrators.
- In its 2012 report, the external auditors for the OAS recommended that an independent audit of BC/BS claims processed for the OAS because of billing errors that have occurred over the past few years. The TOR for this exercise is currently being drafted. BC/BS has also embarked on an internal audit and they have indicated that they will refund any fees that they discover were overcharged.
- In June 2013 a recommendation was made by the committee to increased premiums by 6%. This was approved by the Secretariat for Administration and Finance.
- Discussions in the committee are ongoing regarding proposed changes to the policy on separation. This policy states the conditions under which staff members who separate from the OAS can remain in the health plan and can be found here:
<http://oasconnect/HRBenefits/Benefits/MyBenefits/HealthInsurance/HealthInsuranceCoverageuponseparation/tabid/725/Default.aspx> .
- The Medical Benefits Trust Fund had assets of \$39.4 million at December 31, 2013 compared to \$33.7m and \$29.2m at the end of the corresponding periods in December 2012 and 2013 respectively. The increase in 2013 is due mainly to investment income and it should be noted that there would have been a decline in the fund had if it's only income was contributions from subscribers. Total expenses of \$13.3m were up from \$12.6m in 2012.
- Given trends in claims and expenses, the committee has agreed to recommend a 5% increase in premiums in 2014.

iv. Joint Committee for Reconsideration cases

The Committee was responsible for examining 3 cases during this period. Three reports were issued which were submitted to the Secretary General for his consideration.

The reports of the Committee and the decisions taken by the Secretary General are confidential pursuant to Staff Rule 112.7(j), and are filed in the Staff Association.

v. Joint Committee for Discipline Cases

The Staff Committee representative to this Committee informed that no cases were referred to the Committee during the 2013 to 2014 period.

vi. Performance Evaluation Review Committee

The PERC Committee met on February 26, 2014 to review the cases of 121 staff members who had not completed phase I and/or II of the 2013 Performance Evaluation Cycle, and to decide on the action to be taken. The participants were the two principal members of the Committee, one appointed by the Secretary General and one appointed by the Staff Association and personnel from the Department of Human Resources.

Two sets of cases were identified and after careful consideration, the following decisions were taken by the Committee.

- Staff members who did not complete phase II of the Performance Evaluation Cycle and requested that their cases be reviewed by the PERC: Staff was given a one month extension to complete phase II of the Performance Evaluation Cycle and was reminded of Administrative memorandum No. 92 Rev. 1
- Staff members who did not complete phase II of the Performance Evaluation Cycle and did not request that their cases be reviewed by the PERC: Staff was given a one month extension to complete phase II of the Performance Evaluation Cycle. Staff was also to receive a written warning regarding the consequences of not completing the cycle and of not requesting that their case be reviewed by the PERC. Staff was reminded of Administrative memorandum No. 92 Rev. 1

IV. OTHER ACTIVITIES

i. Leo Rowe Fund Loans

During 2013-2014, the Staff Association guaranteed 25 education loans through the Leo S. Rowe Fund, granted to contributing members of the Staff Association, for a total value of \$98,011, in order to contribute to their personal development and that of their families. The Staff Association acts as guarantor for loans given to contributing members of the Association.

ii. Terry Woods Award

This recognition is awarded annually by the Staff Association, to commemorate the work of Mr. Terry Woods, to staff members who have provided extraordinary services to staff members of the OAS – either through the promotion or protection of their rights, or contributing to their wellbeing or improvement in their working conditions.

The 2013 Terry Woods Award was granted to Rosana Martinelli, from the Executive Secretariat for Integral Development and presented during the Staff Awards Ceremony.

iii. New benefits for members of the Staff Association

Thanks to an agreement with the International Language Institute, corporate discounts were obtained for English, Spanish, French and Portuguese classes for all staff members. During the period of this report, three Portuguese courses and one English course have been completed and one French course is ongoing. A workshop with the Alliance Francaise has also been carried out for the Summer Course students. This is in part to remedy the situation caused by the Administration's decision to eliminate the tuition reimbursement benefit.

In addition, the President of the Staff Committee held several meetings with representatives of Bretton Woods Law, a law firm that specializes in the law of international organizations. This Firm has repeatedly offered its advisory and/or representation services to staff members and to the Staff Association. A Town Hall meeting was scheduled for the winter season had to be cancelled due to weather. Additional details as well as contact information for Bretton Woods Law can be obtained in the office of the Staff Association.

iv. Recreational activities and activities of interest

The Staff Committee organized, promoted and/or supported recreational activities as well as activities of interest to staff members. To date, it has contributed to the following activities held or sponsored during its term of office:

- Annual Exhibit of the Art Group – August 2013.
- Support for the OAS 5K Walk/Run – September 2013
- Organization of the OAS Annual Bazaar – November, 2013
- Organization of the Children's Christmas Party – December, 2013.
- Staff Holiday Toast – December, 2013
- Spring Coed Soccer Tournament – April, 2014
- Support for the Health Fair organized by the Department of Human Resources – April, 2014.
- Staff Association Spring Barbecue – May 2014.
- Tour de Cure with the American Diabetes Association – July, 2014

- Promotion and dissemination of cultural activities and general interest activities in Washington D.C.
- Administration of the OAS Gift Shop.

v. Hiring of Staff Association Administrator.

Following the departure of the previous Administrator of the Staff Association, the 2013-2014 Staff Committee contracted a part-time CPR, which was subsequently converted into a full-time CPR, to carry out these functions. Considering that the functions involved are permanent and recurring in nature, the Committee considered it important that they be provided by a staff member, as before, and therefore, requested that GS/OAS issue a short-term contract for this purpose.

Accordingly, an exception to GS/OAS' "call for resumes" policy, which the Staff Association has objected to since it was first implemented, was requested, in order to hire the Administrator pursuant to the rules currently in force. Effective July 1, 2014, the Staff Association Administrator was hired as a staff member under a short-term contract.