

OAS STAFF ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE STAFF COMMITTEE 2012-2013 July 2012 – July 2013

I. INTRODUCTION

The 2012-2013 Staff Committee informs the staff members of the General Secretariat of the OAS of the work that has been carried out and on the results that have been achieved during its time in office. This document gathers the details of the activities that have been carried out by the Staff Committee and by the representatives of the Joint Committees on which staff members have representation.

II. PERSONNEL MATTERS

The 2012-2013 Staff Committee, which began its functions on July 10, 2012, focused its work on maintaining staff members informed of their rights and obligations, representing the interests of the staff members and in particular, studying and analyzing the proposed modifications to Chapter III of the General Standards, their impact on personnel, and presenting alternatives to protect the acquired rights and the interests of personnel

i. Achievements and activities

In fulfillment of its functions, the Staff Committee placed particular emphasis in 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 transparency and consistent manner. Similarly, the Committee focused on improving the dissemination of information of interest to staff members, in order to promote knowledge of acquired rights and coordination with other International Organizations.

Among the results achieved and the activities carried out, the following can be highlighted:

1. CONTINUED REPRESENTATION OF THE INTERESTS OF STAFF MEMBERS IN RELATION TO CASES OF WORKPLACE HARASSMENT, DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT, PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS, COMPETITIONS, TERMINATIONS AND POST AUDITS.

Activities:

- The provision of advice and support to affected staff members.

- Personalized attention to more than 260 consultations received on labor issues.
- Accompanying and providing advice to staff members in meetings with the General Secretariat to address specific situations.
- Representation of staff members in various Joint Committees.
- Holding of 21 formal meetings of the Staff Committee and multiple informal meetings during the course of the year.
- The holding of a Special Staff Assembly and the adoption of a Declaration.
- Participation and presentation by the President of the Staff Association during the Fortieth anniversary of the OAS Administrative Tribunal, regarding New Trends in the International Administrative Law.

2. DEEPENING OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE STAFF ASSOCIATION ON BUDGETARY MATTERS, THE SYSTEM OF PARITY, HUMAN RESOURCES POLICIES AND PRACTICES, AND ON THEIR RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS.

Activities:

- Drafting and publication of informative and concept documents: Comments and Proposals by the Staff Committee on the different versions of the Proposed Modification to Chapter III of the General Standards.
- The holding of two Informative Sessions for the staff, in order to present the concept documents prepared by the Committee, as well as to comment and inform of the impact on personnel of the proposed changes.
- Drafting and presentation of various documents and requests for information to the General Secretariat about specific situations that directly affect staff members.
- Continuation of the bilingual FYI in order to inform staff of their rights and obligations.
- Permanent communication with staff members through the informative tool, *Staff News*.

3. DEEPENING OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE MEMBERS STATES ON THE RIGHTS AND OBLIGATIONS OF STAFF MEMBERS IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CAAP.

Activities:

- Presentation of documents prepared by the Staff Association in the Working Group on OAS Programs of the Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Affairs of the Permanent Council (CAAP), regarding the revision of the proposed modifications to Chapter III of the General Standards.
- Courtesy visits to the Permanent Missions to the OAS.
- The presence of staff representatives in decision-making fora, such as the CAAP, the Permanent Council (PC) and the General Assembly (GA)

4. CONTINUED COORDINATION WITH OTHER STAFF ASSOCIATIONS OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, PARTICULARLY THROUGH PARTICIPATION IN FICSA.

Activities:

- Participation in training activities proposed by the Federation of International Civil Servants' Association (FICSA)
- Consultations and requests for advice on different matters of interest to personnel.
- Coordination with International Organizations in the Washington area for the identification of new benefits and joint services.
- Requests for support to International Organizations with respect to specific needs.

5. INTENSIFICATION OF THE ACTIONS OF THE STAFF COMMITTEE CALLING FOR COMPLIANCE WITH THE GENERAL STANDARDS.

Activities:

- Working and consultation meetings with representatives of the General Secretariat in order to attend to specific issues or raise concerns and/or specific recommendations.
- Meetings with the Secretary General, the Assistant Secretary General, the Chief of Staff of the Secretary General and the Director of the Department of Legal Services.
- The submission and publication of letters to the competent authorities in relation to the delays in carrying out competitions, performance evaluations, suspension of tuition reimbursements, terminations and the criteria used to determine terminations, staff reductions, order of priority of competitions, *call for resume*, budgetary reductions, among others.
- The holding of a Special Assembly to define actions in relation to the proposed modification to the General Standards.

5. CONTINUATION OF THE WORK OF THE CRISIS SUBCOMMITTEE, RESPONSIBLE FOR REVIEWING TERMINATIONS.

Activities:

- Accompanying and providing advice to staff members.
- Meetings of the Subcommittee.

6. INCREASE IN THE RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES AND ACTIVITIES OF INTEREST OF OR OF BENEFIT TO THE STAFF

Activities:

- Sponsorship of recreational and sporting activities (5k Run/Walk)

- Discounted French classes for contributing members. Agreement with the French Alliance.
- The provision of new services and benefits for contributing members.

ii. Priority Issues

Below, the principal issues addressed by the 2012-2013 Committee are highlighted:

i. Proposed modification to the General Standards

During the entire term of office of the 2012-2013 Staff Committee, the status of this debate has been closely followed in the CAAP, and a series of documents and informative presentations regarding the proposed changes have been drafted. At present, the Staff Committee is drafting a document regarding the administration and management of Human Resources, which will be presented for the consideration of the 2013-2014 Staff Committee.

At the request of the member States, the Staff Committee had the opportunity to present its comments, informally, in August, 2012, to the Power Point presentation prepared by the Department of Human Resources regarding the Human Resources Strategy. The Staff Committee will closely follow this process, counting on the good will of the member States to continue actively participating in the discussions on the proposal, in order to ensure that the staff perspective is present in the deliberations and contents of the document.

The Committee followed the deliberations on the 2013 Program Budget and was present at all of the CAAP meetings that addressed budgetary and personnel matters. Similarly, 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 continue improving channels of communication. The Committee again warned that the budgetary restrictions were no reason not to comply with the General Standards and to foster differential treatment among staff members, and informed about the approval of a 2.2 million dollar cut in the budgetary ceiling for 2014.

The Committee held various Informative Sessions and a Special Assembly to inform staff members about the proposed changes to Chapter III of the General Standards and their impact on present and future staff members, inform about the budgetary situation and about the possibility of breaking of the system of parity with the United Nations with regard to the classification of posts and the salary system.

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

As the staff is aware, there are a large number of staff members whose contractual conditions are irregular, according to the standards currently in force. In this sense, the Committee – based on the schedule prepared by the General Secretariat to hold 60 competitions per year, in groups of 15 per trimester – continued requesting that the General Secretariat accelerate the pending competitions and offered proposals to that end. Similarly, the Committee insisted in ensuring the application of the standards in a transparent and consistent manner, so that all staff members who have the right to compete for their posts could be included in this schedule. This would include all posts financed by Specific Funds and by the Indirect Cost Recovery Fund and who have served the General Secretariat for more than three consecutive years without a competition. The Staff Committee should retake these actions considering that to date, it has not been possible to have these posts included in the schedule.

With respect to the delay in convening the competition for continuing contracts, the Staff Committee repeatedly requested, through various means, that the General Secretariat immediately open that competition. The General Secretariat began the competition process in October, 2012, and the first group was completed in July, 2013, with the granting of 29 continuing contracts. This followed a two year period that exposed the General Secretariat to collective legal action. At the present time, new competitions are pending and following up on this situation will be the task of the 2013-2014 Staff Committee.

iii. Pending Issues.

The Staff Committee should continue its efforts to promote and achieve the recognition of domestic partnerships as a right of staff members of the General Secretariat, as well as restitution of the figure of “*Ombudsman*”. At the same time, the Committee will continue requesting staff member support for the conformation of a Working Group to analyze the implementation of the recommendations made by the Nominating Committee, among other pending issues.

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 these 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

Will present the summary of its activities in August.

ii. Joint Committee Medical Benefits Trust Fund

During 2012-2013, the trust of the Medical Benefits Trust Fund had a positive return of 13.0%. This percentage is above that of the reference investment policy portfolio which had a return of 11.5%. This was due to the difference in the behavior of the mutual funds which performed better than the market/index that they are following. The cashflow is positive; this is one of the premises emphasized by the actuaries (Buck Consultants), in order to maintain a positive actuarial situation with the annual increases in premiums co-financed by employees and the Secretariat.

The meetings following the completion of each quarter were carried out, as planned and adjustments were made both in the internal investment policy, following the counsel of the investment advisor, as well as the necessary re-balancing. To date, a process is being followed to implement the recommendation of the external auditors who requested an audit of the claims and collections system managed by Blue Cross Blue Shield. The preparation of an official Investment Policy document was commenced and is in the process of being finalized.

iii. Joint Insurance Committee

The Joint Committee on insurance recommended that the General Secretariat increase health insurance premiums by 6%, both the personal and the institutional contribution, beginning on January 1, 2014. This recommendation was made to reduce the risk of having to resort to the dividends and interest generated by the investments in the Medical Benefit Trust to cover expenses related to claims and administrative services. This recommendation was approved by the General Secretariat and is subject to approval by the next Special General Assembly, to be held in October 2013.

As of March 31, 2013, the total assets of the Fund amount to 37.1 million compared to 33.3 million as of March 31, 2012, which reflects its financial health. As of December, 2012, the average age of participants was 49, and the number of participants (members) was 2,023.

Changes were also made in the structure of medical co pays in March, 2013, in order to promote the use of generic medications and to limit the amount paid for medications. It should be noted that all payment for visits to doctors, ophthalmologists, dentists, hospitals, and other services and benefits, are made from this fund.

iv. Joint Committee for Reconsideration cases

Will present the summary of its activities in August.

v. Joint Committee for Discipline Cases

Will present the summary of its activities in August.

vi. Performance Evaluation Review Committee

Recently began to operate.

IV. ACTIVITIES OF INTEREST TO THE STAFF

i. Leo Rowe Fund Loans

During 2012-2013, the Staff Association guaranteed 30 education loans through the Leo S. Rowe Fund, granted to contributing members of the Staff Association, for a total value of \$100,502.60, 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

The 2012 Terry Woods Award was given to Maria Teresa Mellenkamp, from the Secretariat for Political Affairs. The award was given in the framework of the Staff Awards Ceremony and was incorporated in the commemorative wall on the TL level of the General Secretariat Building.

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.

iii. New benefits for contributing members of the Staff Association

During the term of office of the 2012-2013 Staff Committee, 43 new contributing members of the Staff Association were registered, bringing the total number of contributing members to 335. This also takes terminations into account. Two new benefits were also provided: Tickets at Work, with discounts for different parks; and an agreement entered into with the French Alliance to obtain corporate discounts for French classes for all staff members. This is in part to remedy the situation caused by the Administration's decision to eliminate the tuition reimbursement benefit.

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.

- Coed Football Tournament, August 2012.
- Annual Exhibit of the Art Group, September, 2012.
- Support for the OAS 5K Walk/Run – September 2012 and August 2013.
- Organization of the Annual OAS Fair, October, 2012.
- Organization of the End of Year Children’s Party, December, 2012.
- Spring Coed Football Tournament, April 2013.
- Support for the Health Fair organized by the Department of Human Resources, April, 2013.
- Promotion and dissemination of cultural activities and general interest activities in Washington D.C.
- Administration of the OAS Gift Shop.