

STAFF COMMITTEE 2010-2011 SIX-MONTH SUMMARY

July – December, 2010

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I. [Introduction](#)

Dear members of the OAS Staff Association,

Following the conclusion of the first semester of our term, we are pleased to inform the staff of the work that has been carried out in their name this past year by the Staff Committee. This document contains the detail of the activities and actions implemented by the Staff Committee, the mixed committees and the working groups created to attend to specific topics of interest that were requested by members of the Association.

It is important to point out that the Committee has always been well received by the representatives of the Secretary General and the Assistant Secretary General¹ with regard to the majority of our work, particularly that which addresses labor relations with the General Secretariat. We are thankful that this open dialogue has been maintained, as well as for the opportunity to present the points of view of the staff to the Administration concerning actions that affect our employment stability and benefits. We are confident that these channels of communication will remain open during the second semester of our term.

The Staff Committee also wishes to express its gratitude to all of the members of the Association for their support and for the time and efforts that some have volunteered to advance our work agenda, as well as for the invaluable contribution of the Consultative Committee, which has provided advice whenever requested.

Finally, as we approach the new election cycle for the Staff Committee, which will take place in June, we wish to renew the invitation to all staff members to actively involve themselves in the work of the Association and remind everyone that the Committee is always willing to attend any concerns of its members.

¹ The details on the activities and meetings held with the Administration are contained in the minutes of the meetings of the Committee, which are available to staff members in the Office of the Staff Association.

These tasks would not be possible without the voluntary contributions made by members, and we therefore reiterate the invitation (link to membership form) for you to update your contributions and thus, strengthen the work of this Association.

Respectfully,

Staff Committee 2010 - 2011

II. Personnel Matters

The Staff Committee 2010-2011, which took office on July 19, 2010, met with the Administration on various occasions, for the purpose of analyzing the challenging financial situation currently faced by the OAS, and specifically, to address its potential impact on the staff. In this sense, the Committee worked together with the Secretary for Administration and Finance and the Director of the Department of Human Resources in order to exchange points of view and convey the staff's opinions on the actions to be taken. On repeated occasions, we stressed the importance of working to improve the channels of communication and transparency, so as to avoid speculation and reduce the level of uncertainty and anxiety among the staff.

The principal issues discussed are as follows:

i. **2011 Budget – Reduction of Personnel and COLA**

The Committee accompanied the Administration in the deliberations on the 2011 Program Budget and was present at all CAAP meetings that addressed personnel issues. On that issue, the Committee focused on the need for the Staff Rules to be respected, principally concerning the separation from service of staff members. Additionally, the Committee sent written communications to the Secretary General in order to request greater clarity with respect to the process of negotiations *for separation from service*. – These communications were shared with all members of the Association. The Secretary General reiterated his intent that all separations be voluntary, and published the details of the packages that were being offered, in order to ensure equal treatment to all staff members. Similarly, the commitment to comply with the payment of the COLA, in accordance with the standards set by the United Nations was reaffirmed. The Committee is following-up on the deliberations taking place in the CAAP and is working with the General Secretariat on this issue, and will inform staff members of any new developments.

ii. **Performance Evaluation System**

Members of the Committee held various meetings with representatives of the Department of Human Resources, in order to closely follow the implementation of the pilot phase of the Performance Evaluation System, which began during the term of office of the previous Staff Committee. With respect to the evaluation meeting with the

supervisor – the last phase of the system – the Department of Human Resources was informed of the concern regarding the existence of a box to be checked by the evaluated staff member, relinquishing the right to appeal by accepting the evaluation and the document. The Committee requested that this option be removed and will follow-up on the revision of the model after the conclusion of this cycle. Staff members are reminded that performance evaluations are to be carried out in accordance with Staff Rule (103.4).

iii. **Contracts, competitions and reclassifications**

The Committee repeatedly received the assurances of SAF that competitions for posts that need to be defined and requests for audits for reclassifications would proceed. In addition, it is expected that, a competition will be opened for continuing contracts in the near future, since, at present, and following the personnel changes over the past year, the number of career and continuing contracts is below the minimum regulatory quota. The Committee will continue to support DHR in order to proceed as quickly as possible with compliance with these labor rights of OAS staff members.

iv. **Revision of the General Standards – contracting mechanisms**

Since last year, the Administration has been reviewing the forms of contracting established in the General Standards, considering that it must present a simplification proposal to the CAAP – pursuant to the last budget resolution. The Administration agreed to invite the Staff Committee to work collectively with DHR in this work, the purpose of which is to simplify the number of types of contracts, without reducing the acquired rights of staff members. The Committee is awaiting word from DHR on the Administration's proposal, in order to review it and issue an opinion, and will inform the staff on any new developments in this area.

v. **Ombudsman**

The Committee has continued requesting that the General Secretariat appoint an Ombudsman. The previous Staff Committee submitted a short-list of candidates that offered to serve in this capacity free-of-charge, and we are awaiting a response on this issue.

III. **Mixed Committees and Working Groups**

The mixed Committees continued carrying out their tasks. The Staff Committee is grateful for the commitment and work of the staff representatives in these committees. Additionally, the Staff Committee made progress in follow-up to the tasks of the working groups created to deal with specific issues of interest to the staff. The most important points are as follows:

i. **Mixed Health Committee**

The Mixed Health Committee informed the Staff Committee of its concern about the reduction of the contributions made by the General Secretariat to the Health Fund – according to the budget approved for 2011 – and its impact on the future state of the Fund. This has a direct impact on the payment of contributions made by the members

of the Fund, as well as on co-pays for medical visits and exams. The Staff Committee will closely follow this situation and will inform the members of the Association of any related developments.

ii. Paternity Leave and Domestic Partnerships

Based on the proposals presented by the Working Groups on these topics, in a communication dated October 25, 2010, the Staff Committee presented the Secretary General with proposals for paternity leave and the institutional recognition of the rights for domestic partnerships.

The proposal for modification of the rules, which establishes paternity leave, includes a clarification that this type of leave will also be granted to adoptive fathers and mothers.

At the same time, the proposal for the institutional recognition of domestic partnerships was prepared based on the legislation that currently exists in International organizations similar to the OAS, such as the IADB, the World Bank, the IMF, and the United Nations.

DHR has informed the Staff Committee that the proposals were sent to the Legal Department for an opinion – it is expected that this opinion will be issued in the coming days.

iii. Lactating Mothers

The Staff Committee will approach the Department of Human Resources, in order to support lactating mothers. In this sense, the Committee will seek to formalize the ad-hoc practices that have occurred in specific cases, offering reduced working hours and/or time to be able to make use of the lactation rooms in the OAS Headquarters buildings in Washington, D.C.

iv. Tele-work

In view of the climate at this time of the year, and taking into account that the OAS follows the decisions of the Office of Personnel Management of the U.S. Federal Government with respect to inclement weather, the Committee considers it essential to once again address the negotiations regarding tele-working with the Administration. This option is offered by the Federal Government, and accordingly, should be among the options offered to OAS staff members. The Staff Committee will be contacting the Department of Human Resources to take up this issue once again, and proceed based on the proposal made in previous years.

v. Gender Group

In July, 2010, the Staff Committee sent the results of the analysis prepared by the Working Group on professional women in the OAS to the Secretary General. That document also presents recommendations to support compliance with the mandate of the General Assembly that “women, including indigenous women, occupy 50 percent of posts at each grade level within the organs, agencies, and entities of the Organization of American States (OAS), particularly at the P-5 grade level and above...”[AG/RES. 2452 (XXXIXO/09)]. Along these lines, the Committee welcomes

the appointments of Sherry Tross as the Secretary of Summits, of Lili Romero as the Director of the Office of Procurement, of Carmen Lucía de la Pava as Chief of Staff of the Assistant Secretary General, as Tony Gaxiola as the Director of the Department of Human Resources, and of María Rosa Barreiro as the Director of the Department of Institutional Image.

IV. Staff Promotion

i. Leo Rowe Fund Loans

During 2010, the Leo S. Rowe Fund granted 33 education loans to contributing members of the Staff Association, valued at \$162,795, in order to contribute to the personal development of staff members. These loans, with annual interest rates of 3.25% in 2010, are supplemental assistance to cover tuition expenses for staff members or their dependents.

It should be noted that in 2010, the Fund surveyed 135 Fund beneficiaries and ex-beneficiaries, and received a response from 45.9% of those surveyed. Among those that responded, and who used the respective loan to cover the cost of their studies, 87% stated that the field of study was related to their line of work, and 16.1% of those concluded that their studies assisted in their reclassification or promotion within the OAS (for additional information, click here:

<http://www.staff.oas.org/documents/Rowe%20Fund-SurveyResultsStaffMembers.pdf>).

ii. Terry Woods Award

On August 31, 2010, the Terry Woods Award was granted to Mr. William Berenson, within the framework of the General Secretariat's Staff Awards Ceremony. This recognition is offered annually to staff members who have provided extraordinary services to OAS staff members – whether in the promotion, furtherance, or protection of their rights, contributions to their well-being, or improving their working conditions.

iii. Informative Workshops

To date, two informative workshops have been held regarding U.S. immigration matters. The first of these was in Spanish on October 22, 2010, and was given by attorney and former staff member Ignacio Álvarez. On November 4, 2010, attorney Linda Hoffman offered a similar presentation in English.

In addition, advisors from Morgan Stanley carried out 4 seminars for staff related to investments, retirement plans, management of saving accounts and insurance plans.

V. Activities related to Staff Interests and Recreation.

The Staff Committee, on behalf of the Staff Association, organizes, promotes and/or supports recreational activities and other activities of interest to the staff. To date, it has contributed to the following activities:

- Annual Exhibition of the Art Group, June, 2010
- Halloween Party, October, 2010
- Summer Football Tournament, July, 2010
- Registration in the DC *Cyclist Association* de DC
- OAS Health Fair
- Promotion of the *Walking Work* initiative within the Framework of the OAS Health Fair
- Organization of the OAS Annual Bazaar
- Organization of the End of Year Children's Party, December, 2010
- Coordination of the OAS Gift Shop

To obtain more information on these activities, or for information on how to participate in them, we invite you to visit the Offices of the Staff Association, located on the 6th floor of the GSB.

VI. Humanitarian Assistance

The Association has joined the humanitarian initiatives that affect our region. At the request of staff members, voluntary collections of funds have been made to support the reconstruction in Haiti following last year's earthquake, as well as for victims of the earthquake in Chile and of Hurricane Mitch. In addition, more specific actions were supported in Grenada and Colombia.

Additionally, in 2010, the Organizing Committee for the End of Year Children's Party, proposed, in view of the devastating consequences of the earthquake in Haiti, participation in the OAS initiative "Backpacks for Haiti", on behalf of the Association. Together with the support of PAHO Staff Association, which co-sponsored the holiday party, 123 backpacks containing school supplies were donated and given to the coordinators of the initiative.

Within the framework of the Christmas celebrations, the Association also held a "Toy Drive" for the "La Clinica del Pueblo". The collected toys were given on December 16, 2010.