

Outcome of the Sixty-first World Health Assembly

1. The Sixty-First World Health Assembly dealt with a heavy agenda, covering 14 subitems under Technical and health matters; programme budget and financial matters; audit and oversight matters, including the report of the external and internal auditors; staffing matters; management matters; collaboration within the United Nations system and with other intergovernmental organizations; health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan; amendments to the Statute of the International Agency for Research on Cancer; and outcome of the second session of the Conference of the Parties to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. In all, the Health Assembly adopted 21 resolutions and 1 decision.

2. The Director-General, in her report, stressed the fact that the Assembly was meeting in a time of tragedy. In the wake of recent disasters, Dr Chan looked ahead at three looming crises: soaring food prices, which could undermine adequate nutrition – the foundation of health; climate change, which is expected to bring more droughts, floods and tropical storms, and greater demands for humanitarian assistance; and pandemic influenza, the threat of which has not receded. In the first two cases, the poor are at greatest risk. She also discussed some of the other major health challenges confronting the world, including ancient afflictions like leprosy, and reported on the mixed progress towards poliomyelitis eradication. Referring to the fact that the opening of the Sixty-first World Health Assembly marked the 60th anniversary of WHO, Dr Chan pointed out that the landscape of public health has changed and that WHO was not alone in the drive to improve health; leadership was not mandated, but earned.

3. The Health Assembly heard two invited speakers: Her Royal Highness Princess Muna Al-Hussein of Jordan, WHO Patron for Nursing and Midwifery in the Eastern Mediterranean Region since March 2003, and Bishop Desmond Tutu, Archbishop Emeritus, Cape Town and Nobel Prize Laureate. Both drew attention to current health challenges and approaches to meet them. Her Royal Highness Princess Muna Al-Hussein, spoke of the unrest in her Region where conflicts and other crises continue to disrupt and strain health systems and have an enormously negative impact on people's well-being. She urged ministers to focus on human resources in their own countries, calling for increased efforts to provide better health and education services, and to empower women in efforts to save lives of children and prevent maternal deaths during, or as a result of, childbirth. Bishop Tutu paid tribute to the human spirit and the capacity of all people to do good and urged that spiritual health was essential to human well-being. It is evident from generations of witness that no situation cannot be transformed. He thanked the Health Assembly for its "tenacious commitment and what this means in the lives of the more than six billion residents of this planet."

COMMITTEE A

4. In view of the Committee's heavy agenda of pressing and challenging public-health issues, two agenda subitems were transferred to Committee B. Among the items considered by Committee A were: pandemic influenza preparedness: sharing of influenza viruses and access to vaccines and benefits; poliomyelitis: mechanism for management of potential risks to eradication; implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005); prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases: implementation of the global strategy; public health, innovation and intellectual property: draft global strategy and plan of action; female genital mutilation; strategies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol; and climate change and health.

5. The Committee deferred one item, counterfeit medical products, for further consideration by the Executive Board, recommending that it be included on the agenda of its 124th session.

6. Nine resolutions were approved by consensus under technical and health matters in Committee A: Poliomyelitis: mechanism for management of potential risks to eradication; Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005); Strategies to reduce the harmful use of alcohol; Prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases: implementation of the global strategy; Global immunization strategy; Female genital mutilation; Health of migrants; Climate change and health; and Public health, innovation and intellectual property: global strategy and plan of action. The latter was adopted after extensive negotiations in a drafting group, and covers the global strategy, as well as the agreed parts of the plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property. The final plan of action will be submitted for consideration by the Sixty-second World Health Assembly through the Executive Board.

COMMITTEE B

7. The Committee started its work with the discussion on the health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan. A draft resolution was proposed by a Member State, and in accordance with Rule 74 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly, a roll-call vote was taken. The draft resolution was approved, with an amendment, by 97 votes in favour, to 9 votes against, with 11 abstentions and 65 Member States absent.

8. Under Programme budget and financial matters, four resolutions were approved: Financial report and audited financial statements for the period 1 January 2006 – 31 December 2007; Miscellaneous income 2006–2007 and financing gap for strategic objectives 12 and 13; Members in arrears in the payment of their contributions to an extent that would justify invoking Article 7 of the Constitution; and Special arrangements for settlement of arrears: Kyrgyzstan.

9. On audit and oversight matters, the Committee approved one resolution: Report of the External Auditor to the Health Assembly.

10. On staffing matters, the Committee approved one resolution on amendments to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules and a decision on the Appointment of representatives to the WHO Staff Pension Committee, and, under Management matters, two resolutions: Method of work of the Health Assembly, and Multilingualism: implementation of action plan.

11. On a separate agenda item, the Committee approved a draft resolution amending the Statute of the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

12. Two subitems under Technical and health matters were transferred from Committee A: Monitoring achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals, and Progress reports on technical and health matters. Two resolutions were approved: Monitoring of the achievement of the health-related Millennium Development Goals and Infant and young child nutrition.

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