

WHO reform

Options for improved decision-making by the governing bodies

Use of an electronic voting system for the appointment of the Director-General

Report by the Secretariat

1. In resolution WHA66.18, the Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly requested the Director-General "... to explore options for the use of electronic voting for the appointment of the Director-General, including the financial and electronic security implications thereof, and to report thereon, through the Executive Board, to the Sixty-seventh World Health Assembly".
2. This report accordingly addresses the possible options for and implications of introducing an electronic voting system for the process of election of the Director-General. Even though the request in resolution WHA66.18 refers only to the appointment of the Director-General, the Board may equally be interested in exploring the use of electronic voting for the nomination of the candidate that it submits to the Health Assembly.

OPTIONS AVAILABLE

3. The Secretariat held extensive discussions with ILO and WMO, which are currently using electronic voting systems at their governing bodies meetings.
4. ILO introduced an electronic voting system into its International Labour Conference (the plenary body of the Organization) in 1993. It replaced the equipment in 2003 and, latterly, in 2012 with a new system consisting of mobile voting stations and touch screen tablets linked to a central server by a wireless connection. This system has been combined with ILO's conference management system, meaning that the voting system is integrated with the processes of accreditation, preparation of the list of delegates entitled to vote, and computation of the quorum and majority required, as well as counting of votes.
5. WMO has been using a radio-based electronic voting system (keypad, a central receiving station and voting software) for the election of the officers and members of the Executive Council for the past three years. As the system is radio-based (no internet connection needed), it is less susceptible to outside interference and is not affected by power outages (because the radio units have battery backup) or high internet traffic. To maintain the confidentiality of the process, each principal delegate is given an unregistered keypad and a five-digit pin code. In other words, there is no association between Member States and the key pads and pin codes distributed to them. This ensures that the identity of the voter remains unknown to the Secretariat, as well as to the operators of the voting system.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6. ILO has expressed its willingness to make its electronic voting system available to WHO on a cost recovery basis. The total estimated cost of renting the system from ILO (including demonstration, software adjustments, preparatory and real-time support) is approximately 20 000 Swiss francs (for both the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board).

7. A Zurich-based private company, GroupConsulter AG, provides the system to WMO, as well as real-time support during that Organization's two-day General Assembly, at a cost of approximately 6 000 Swiss francs. GroupConsulter AG has offered to provide the voting system and real-time support to WHO at an estimated total cost of 9 100 Swiss francs (3 000 Swiss francs for the Executive Board and 6 100 Swiss francs for the Health Assembly).

8. The Secretariat has also explored the possibility of purchasing an electronic voting system from private companies. According to an estimate from GroupConsulter AG, the cost of purchasing its radio-based system (210 voting keypads, receiver station, voting software, transportation and instruction) is around Swiss francs 65 000. ILO estimated the cost of acquiring its web-based system (210 tablet computers, a server station and the requisite software) from Advania Iceland as being between US\$ 60 000 and US\$ 110 000.

9. Given the fact that the system is needed only once every five years for the nomination and appointment of the Director-General, spending at least 65 000 Swiss francs would not be an efficient use of WHO resources, in the view of the Secretariat. In addition to the high initial investment, there will inevitably be a need to upgrade the system as new technology becomes available, and to establish capacity to run and maintain the system. Hence the Secretariat recommends, at least on an initial basis, that WHO rent the service from GroupConsulter AG as and when the system is needed.

SECURITY IMPLICATIONS

10. Like any other information technology system, an electronic voting system is subject to security risks. These risks can be minimized by constantly updating security measures and minimizing the number of staff members who have access to the system. In the case of ILO, only the Head, Management Support Unit, Official Meetings, Documentation and Relations Department and staff of the Legal Services, as well as data entry staff, are authorized to access the system. In the case of WMO, the administrator of the system and the Director, Cabinet and External Relations Department have access to the system.

11. If the recommendation to introduce an electronic voting system by renting it from GroupConsulter AG is accepted, the system should be tested in advance and a round of mock votes should be conducted, in order to build Member States' familiarity and confidence. In that case, the Secretariat would propose conducting a mock vote at the Sixty-ninth World Health Assembly in 2016, in order to ensure adequate preparation and understanding of the system for use in the appointment of the next Director-General in 2017. If it is decided that electronic voting will also be introduced for the secret ballots to be held by the Board, mock votes should also be conducted at one of the Board's sessions in 2016.

12. Finally, it cannot be excluded that the electronic voting system may not work properly owing to technical problems (as was the case at the International Labour Conference in 2012). Contingency arrangements should therefore be in place, in case of system malfunction, to enable the vote to proceed manually.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

13. The Board is invited to consider the report and the recommendations of the Secretariat.

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