

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FIRST MEETING

**WHO headquarters, Geneva
Thursday, 24 January 2019, scheduled at 09:00**

Chairman: Ms M.N. FARANI AZEVÊDO (Brazil)

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FIRST MEETING

Thursday, 24 January 2019, at 09:20

Chairman: Ms M.N. FARANI AZEVÊDO (Brazil)

1. OPENING OF THE SESSION AND ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA: Item 1 of the provisional agenda (documents EB144/1 and EB144/1 (annotated))

Opening of the session

The CHAIRMAN declared open the 144th session of the Executive Board.

Adoption of the agenda

The CHAIRMAN drew attention to a proposal by the Secretariat to delete provisional agenda item 7.4, Membership of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee, as there were no issues to consider in that regard. She also drew attention to a proposal by the Secretariat to delete provisional agenda item 8.3, Amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules, as no proposals for amendments had been received. She took it that the Board agreed to those proposals.

It was so agreed.

The representative of ROMANIA, speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, said that the candidate countries Turkey, Montenegro and Albania, the country of the stabilization and association process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, aligned themselves with his statement. He recalled that, as agreed in an exchange of letters in 2000 between WHO and the European Commission on the consolidation and intensification of cooperation, and without prejudice to any future general agreement between WHO and the European Union, the European Union attended sessions of the Board as an observer. He requested that, as at previous sessions, representatives of the European Union should be invited to participate, without vote, in the meetings of the 144th session of the Board and its committees, subcommittees, drafting groups or other subdivisions that addressed matters falling within the competence of the European Union.

The agenda before the Board was particularly heavy, and he called on the Secretariat to propose measures to improve the management of governing body meetings. In his view, reducing agenda length would be the best way to avoid night and weekend meetings without any need to extend sessions.

The European Union and its Member States attached particular importance to the United Nations reform, which WHO was expected to implement from January 2019. He proposed that agenda item 7.1 should be addressed through two separate debates – the first on WHO reform processes, including the transformation agenda, and the second on the implementation of the United Nations development system reform. To support the discussion of the latter, he requested further details of how WHO would fully implement the United Nations reform.

The representative of FINLAND said that the structure of the provisional agenda, which divided items into sections based on their level of priority, had not been approved by Member States. She proposed that the agendas of future meetings of the governing bodies should be aligned with the four pillars of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 for greater consistency and clarity.

She expressed disappointment that an issue that had been requested as a priority by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, namely the role of WHO in countries, had not been included in the session's documentation.

The representative of ROMANIA, speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, expressed support for the proposal to align future agendas of the governing bodies with the Thirteenth General Programme of Work. The Secretariat should prepare a document on the structure of future agendas.

The CHAIRMAN said that the Secretariat would submit proposals for the agendas of future Executive Board meetings in due course. A document on the work of WHO in country offices would also be produced. She took it that the Board wished to accede to the request on the participation of the European Union and agreed to address item 7.1 of the provisional agenda item 7.1 in two separate discussions.

It was so agreed.

The agenda, as amended, was adopted.¹

Election of officers

The CHAIRMAN noted that Dr Mohammed Jaber Hwoal Al-Taae (Iraq), elected as Rapporteur at the Board's 143rd session, had been replaced as a Board member. She drew attention to a proposal by the Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region to elect Dr Faeqa bint Saeed Alsaleh (Bahrain) as Rapporteur for the remainder of the term. She took it that that proposal was acceptable to the Board.

It was so agreed.

2. REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL: Item 2 of the agenda (document EB144/2)

The DIRECTOR-GENERAL, introducing his report, highlighted the importance of listening to young people and giving them a platform for their ideas on transforming society. In recent months, he had made several visits to the field to see the reality of WHO's work. Those experiences had been humbling and interested Board members would be welcome to accompany him on similar visits in 2019.

Implementation of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 had begun in earnest and progress had already been made towards the “triple billion” goals of universal health coverage, better protection from health emergencies and better health and well-being. There would also be discussion and implementation of new initiatives in 2019, which would require WHO to transform and to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the broader United Nations reform. The transformation of WHO should ensure: a measurable impact at the country level; relevance in all countries; normative and technical excellence and leadership; and innovation with a focus on digital health.

That transformation would be achieved through a new strategy, the introduction of new processes, and a new operating model and culture at WHO. Integrity was a key value for WHO and it should be noted that the Organization took a zero tolerance approach towards harassment, sexual harassment,

¹ Document EB144/1 Rev.1.

exploitation and abuse. Diversity was another important value, and action would continue to be taken at all levels of the Organization to improve diversity.

The representative of ROMANIA, speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, said that the candidate countries Montenegro and Albania, the country of the stabilization and association process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova, aligned themselves with his statement. He requested more details on the key decisions and policies resulting from WHO's first Global Management Meeting, which had been held in Nairobi in December 2018 in the context of the transformation agenda. WHO should have a strong and efficient presence in Geneva; the strengthening of regional and country offices should not undermine its ability to ensure that core functions were being fulfilled globally from headquarters. As part of its reform, WHO must continue to engage with non-State actors and seek the best way to capitalize on their inputs and expertise.

He supported the draft proposed programme budget 2020–2021, particularly its focus on measurable impacts and taking an integrated approach, but expressed concern that the proposed target of US\$ 99 million for savings through reallocation and efficiencies might be unattainable without a plan on how to achieve it. Synergies between the proposed global action plan for healthy lives and well-being for all, the Thirteenth General Programme of Work and the draft proposed programme budget 2020–2021 were encouraged. Applauding WHO's response to the Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2018, he emphasized the importance of scaling up capacity at the country level to tackle health threats and implement the International Health Regulations (2005).

The representative of SRI LANKA, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the South-East Asia Region, said that, to control the rapid growth of noncommunicable diseases, countries must reform their health care systems and increase health staff numbers. Health sectors should be more decentralized and field-oriented and place more emphasis on awareness-raising. He commended WHO's increased focus on mental health but noted that expertise was needed to manage national and regional programmes in a sustainable manner and to expand services at the grass-roots level. He supported the Director-General's stance on digital innovations in health care.

The representative of the NETHERLANDS, speaking on behalf of Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Luxemburg, Monaco, New Zealand, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America, expressed appreciation for the Secretariat's response to recent allegations of misconduct at WHO. In such situations, action in the form of due process and investigation would strengthen confidence in the Secretariat's ability to fairly and appropriately address complaints. It was essential to create an organizational culture and implement policies and systems, including whistle-blower mechanisms, that would prevent and respond to harassment and other misconduct. The Secretariat should also review its whole system of prevention and investigation, bolster its checks and balances and assess the need for funding and resources in that regard. He also expressed appreciation for efforts to improve diversity and the working culture within the Organization.

The representative of GERMANY said that a strong WHO could not be achieved without a strong Executive Board. To enhance its role, the Board should be briefed, in writing, on key challenges and important decisions taken by the Secretariat at least once between its May and January sessions.

The representative of INDONESIA welcomed the inclusion of universal health coverage as a strategic priority in the Thirteenth General Programme of Work. Access to high-quality and affordable medicines and vaccines was important to attaining universal health coverage and the health-related Sustainable Development Goals. Implementation of the Polio Eradication and Endgame Strategic Plan post-2018 required better preparation through the collection of quality data on and analysis of polio

outbreaks, improved coordination to ensure the availability of sufficient inactivated polio vaccine, and the provision of timely funding for polio eradication and transition programmes. The Secretariat should increase its support for and collaboration with Member States to address noncommunicable diseases through promotion and prevention initiatives and sustainable financing.

The representative of ESWATINI, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, said that the commitment to increasing the capacity of country offices as part of the WHO transformation process should be reflected in budget allocations to ensure sufficient funds to build technical capacity, even in smaller Member States. He joined the Director-General in appealing to the donor community to consider changing funding arrangements by moving from the use of earmarked resources to a more flexible set-up. Member States, partners and donors should consider replenishing the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria in 2019. Further consideration should be given to the representation of non- and underrepresented Member States within WHO. When managing cases of fraud and alleged misconduct by WHO staff, the Secretariat should always uphold the principles of fairness, objectivity and professionalism.

The representative of CHINA commended efforts thus far in pushing forward with WHO reform. As part of the reform process, the Secretariat should focus on building the confidence of Member States and encouraging the sharing of experience and good practices.

The representative of FINLAND said that the WHO transformation process should lead to a more effective Organization, working with its partners to implement the Sustainable Development Goals. It was vital for Member States and partners to trust the Organization to deliver on its mandate; transparency, efficiency, accountability and good governance were essential in building such trust. WHO staff played a key role in the transformation process and must be appreciated and supported in their work.

The representative of SUDAN, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, said that it was important to further promote the role and contribution of country offices. The Secretariat should increase resources to ensure greater complementarity between development and health. Welcoming the Secretariat's response to the allegations of misconduct in the Organization, he emphasized the need to conduct the appropriate investigations. Transparency within the Organization was vital to uphold its integrity.

The representative of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA commended WHO staff on their efforts to respond to the Ebola virus disease outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Building capacity to work effectively across the three levels of the Organization and deliver results for communities was at the heart of the WHO transformation agenda, and the focus on measurable impacts in the draft proposed programme budget 2020–2021 was therefore welcome.

The representative of JAMAICA welcomed the Director-General's drive to create a new culture and mindset within the Organization to address issues such as harassment, abuse and lack of diversity.

The representative of ISRAEL said that it was important to step up efforts on noncommunicable diseases and ensure adequate funding; WHO should continue to fulfil its leadership and standard-setting role in that area. He welcomed the planned increase in investment to expand WHO's work supporting data collection and innovation. The Organization should lead and coordinate efforts in the areas of digital health and artificial intelligence to increase efficiency and global impact, and reduce gaps between countries and regions.

The representative of LIBYA underscored the need to find more flexible solutions to address the complicated health emergencies faced by certain countries. Health care provision for refugees should be improved and the risk of exposure of the local populace in host countries to infectious diseases should be taken into consideration.

The representative of FIJI, speaking on behalf of the Pacific island countries, welcomed Secretariat efforts to combat noncommunicable diseases, which had reached crisis point in his region. With reference to the reform of the global internship programme, he highlighted the importance of providing support to build the capacity of future leaders in small island nations in the Pacific, in order to foster better interaction and facilitate access to WHO and its initiatives.

The representative of VIET NAM welcomed the Director-General's comprehensive report and expressed support for the goals of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work. The General Programme of Work had been used to improve national health activities in his country.

The representative of the PHILIPPINES¹ welcomed the use of a participatory process to develop, finalize and implement the Thirteenth General Programme of Work and the related WHO Impact Framework. He emphasized the importance of work at the country level, citing recent gains in his country made with support from the WHO country office.

The representative of THAILAND¹ said that WHO leaders should make greater use of their social and intellectual capital to support Member States in moving ahead with evidence-based policy actions. At all levels of the Organization they should ensure that they are good role models by exhibiting healthy behaviours, including increased physical activity, sufficient rest, less travel and better weight management. In addition, all WHO meetings should be alcohol-free.

The representative of KENYA¹ said that the links between universal health coverage and other outcomes critical to achieving Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages) should be strengthened. He supported the WHO transformation agenda and welcomed the Director-General's efforts to embrace new technologies and innovations in health to improve access to health services for hard-to-reach populations. The commitment to upholding integrity and ethical practices within the Organization was welcome.

The representative of CÔTE D'IVOIRE¹ encouraged the Secretariat to continue to seek innovative sources of financing to facilitate the implementation of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work. With regard to discrimination, equality and abuse in the workplace, he reaffirmed his country's full confidence in the Director-General's ability to guide the Secretariat in preventing and addressing any such misconduct within the Organization.

The representative of the RUSSIAN FEDERATION¹ said that the WHO reform process should be as transparent as possible for Member States. He supported efforts to monitor and prevent public health emergencies, but noted that the Organization had not responded effectively to the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. More strategic use of Member State technical resources would have strengthened response measures. His Government stood ready to send specialized medical teams, mobile laboratories, protective gear for staff and vaccines to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to help to support efforts on the ground.

¹ Participating by virtue of Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.

The representative of NORWAY¹ underlined that the WHO transformation agenda must be fully aligned with the United Nations reform and that the Organization's leadership role and normative function must be preserved and developed, all of which would require a strong WHO headquarters. He expressed appreciation for the Organization's leadership on the proposed global action plan for healthy lives and well-being and for the documents produced by the Secretariat for discussions on universal health coverage. He commended its work on air pollution and climate change and looked forward to advancing discussions in that area, particularly on the issue of health and climate change in small island developing States. He encouraged the Secretariat to mainstream gender in all its activities and welcomed confirmation of the Organization-wide policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The representative of the UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND¹ welcomed the Director-General's continued affirmation of progress made in the WHO transformation process and alignment with the United Nations reform. However, there was a need for evidence of tangible action and more transparency on the process, including sharing with Member States not only the vision, but also details of how it would be achieved. He fully supported the initiatives that WHO had already taken against harassment, bullying, sexual exploitation and abuse, and reaffirmed the importance of WHO's leadership in empowering staff to report cases of abuse and misconduct.

The representative of DENMARK¹ said that strengthening primary health care was key to achieving universal health coverage, and that WHO had a crucial role to play in developing and sharing good practices to that end. The Director-General should demonstrate strong leadership in supporting Member States with the development of primary health care systems and the implementation of the values, principles and commitments of the Declaration of Astana on primary health care.

The representative of the PLURINATIONAL STATE OF BOLIVIA¹ said that, while primary health care and access to high-quality, affordable medicines and vaccines were fundamental to achieving universal health coverage, access to affordable medicines remained a major challenge. More efforts should be focused on the funding mechanisms for research and development of high-quality, affordable medicines. The draft road map for access to medicines, vaccines and other health products 2019–2023 should investigate the causes of overpricing of medicines, especially those used to treat cancer and tuberculosis. The draft WHO global strategy on health, environment and climate change: the transformation needed to improve lives and well-being sustainably through healthy environments must take into account the different vulnerabilities and capacities of countries and their responsibilities and obligations under the relevant climate change agreements.

The representative of SOUTH AFRICA¹ said that the success of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work would hinge on ensuring that resources were available for its implementation on the ground, particularly in the African Region. Increased investment in the programmes and countries that were furthest behind on health indicators would be key. She commended efforts to dedicate funding to priority areas and to address allegations of harassment, intimidation, abuse and discriminatory behaviour. She encouraged alignment of the WHO transformation process with the United Nations reform and called on WHO to wield due influence to ensure health-related concerns and investments were appropriately represented in discussions.

The representative of INDIA,¹ highlighting that India would be hosting the Global Digital Health Partnership in New Delhi in 2019, expressed appreciation for the inclusion of digital health as a key

¹ Participating by virtue of Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.

pillar of the WHO transformation agenda. He was confident that the Secretariat would take further steps to implement resolution WHA71.7 (2018) on digital health.

The representative of the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA¹ commended action taken by the Director-General and his team to transform the Organization and ensure WHO's leadership role in the United Nations reform, thereby maximizing the potential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the "triple billion" goals. She also welcomed efforts to expand health partnerships and increase stakeholder engagement to enhance support for global health policies, including by working with governments, the private sector and civil society, as well as parliamentarians, who should have greater involvement in promoting global health policies.

The representative of TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO,¹ welcoming the reform efforts, said that mindset was indeed an important element of reform; a diverse WHO would be stronger and more effective. She thanked the Director-General for his leadership in tackling the Ebola outbreaks in 2018 and commended the Secretariat's work towards addressing climate change and its effects on small island developing States, diversity in the Organization, noncommunicable diseases, universal health coverage, air pollution and women's health, specifically cervical cancer and maternal health.

The representative of MONTENEGRO¹ welcomed the importance attached to the United Nations reform, notably through the planned strengthening of WHO regional and country offices, which would support measures to enhance accountability and transparency across the Organization. Recent efforts to improve collaboration in global health governance and mainstream Sustainable Development Goal 3 were also commendable, and he looked forward to seeing synergies developed between the proposed global action plan for healthy lives and well-being for all, the Thirteenth General Programme of Work and the programme budget. The Organization should continue to align its work closely with the Sustainable Development Goals, focusing on a multisectoral and human rights-based approach.

The DIRECTOR-GENERAL, thanking Member States for their comments and recommendations, said that good progress had been made on the proposed global action plan for healthy lives and well-being for all, with 12 agencies having committed to the three strategic approaches – align, accelerate and account. He thanked the Governments of Germany, Ghana and Norway, which had initiated the proposed global action plan, for challenging WHO to take on the role of coordination at both the global and country levels; with the support of the other Member States, the Organization would be able to use the mechanism to serve beneficiaries more effectively. Responding to the representative of Eswatini, he observed that one element of the proposed global action plan involved improving resource mobilization alignment to avoid competition.

He called on Member States to make a political commitment to addressing health inequities in the world at the High-level Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on Universal Health Coverage in September 2019. Many commitments had been made regarding universal health coverage since its inception 70 years previously, most notably with the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, which had marked a paradigm shift. It was now time to deliver on those promises, and the most effective way of doing so was to invest in primary health care, since early detection and prevention were the best and most cost-effective ways of tackling health challenges.

The United Nations reform represented a great opportunity for WHO; the Secretariat was making every effort to align the Organization's transformation with that reform and needed the support of Member States. He would continue to report on progress in that regard.

¹ Participating by virtue of Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.

He agreed that a written report could be produced between Executive Board sessions. As previously suggested, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Executive Board, alongside the regional coordinators, could take responsibility for producing such a report.

Gender mainstreaming needed to be implemented throughout the Organization, with all departments taking ownership of the process. WHO aimed to be an open Organization, where people did not self-censor, but felt free to discuss any issue with anyone else. An open-door policy had been implemented, and he personally held regular open-door sessions. Openness was also key to increasing productivity and preventing harassment. Becoming an open organization would take time, but WHO was committed to openness, including with Member States.

The CHAIRMAN took it that the Board wished to conclude the discussion of the agenda item.

It was so agreed.

The meeting rose at 12:20.

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