

Multilingualism: respect for equality among the official languages

The Seventy-first World Health Assembly,

Having considered the report by the Director-General;¹

Recalling United Nations General Assembly resolution 71/328 that calls for multilingualism to be addressed in a cost-neutral practical, efficient and cost-effective manner;

Mindful that the universality of WHO is based, inter alia, on multilingualism and on the respect for the parity and plurality of the official languages chosen by the Member States;

Recalling the resolutions and rules governing language arrangements at WHO, especially resolution WHA50.32 (1997) on respect for equality among the official languages, resolution WHA51.30 (1998) on method of work of the Health Assembly, which requested the Director-General to make WHO governing body documents available on the Internet, and resolution EB105.R6 (2000) on the use of languages in WHO;

Convinced of the importance of respect for the diversity of cultures and the plurality of international languages for improving health policies in the world, especially in the developing countries, and for giving all Member States access to information and to scientific and technical cooperation;

Regretting that the various official languages and the working languages are still used unequally within WHO;

Reaffirming the need to ensure high-quality translation of documents into all official languages of the Organization;

Considering that the preparation and distribution of the essential technical information of the Organization, such as the WHO guidelines, in the six official languages is one of the fundamental conditions for equality among Member States;

¹ Document A71/50.

Stressing the need to achieve full parity among the six official languages including on the WHO Internet site,

REQUESTS the Director-General:

- (1) to take into account recommendations contained in United Nations General Assembly resolution 71/328 and to work in cooperation with the United Nations Secretary-General's language services, including to develop cost-neutral approaches;
- (2) to apply the rules of the Organization that establish linguistic practice within the Secretariat in a cost-neutral practical, efficient and cost-effective manner;
- (3) to ensure that all language services are given equal treatment and are provided with equally favourable working conditions and resources, with a view to achieving maximum quality of services;
- (4) to promote multilingualism in the daily work of the Secretariat and encourage staff to take advantage of technical and scientific literature generated in the maximum number of languages, both official and non-official, in a cost effective-manner;
- (5) to ensure that job descriptions specify the need for multilingual skills, including a working language of the Secretariat;
- (6) to appoint an officer who can serve as Coordinator for Multilingualism, who will be responsible, inter alia, for supervising and supporting the overall implementation of multilingualism, and to call upon all WHO departments to fully support the work of the Coordinator in the implementation of the relevant mandates on multilingualism;
- (7) to continue to improve and update in a cost-effective manner the WHO Internet site in all official languages to make it more widely accessible and to develop a multilingual public communication strategy;
- (8) to take the necessary steps to ensure, including through improved planning and coordination, the timely translation into all official languages of the essential technical information of the Organization and WHO guidelines, whether in written, audiovisual or digital form, making such information more widely accessible without undue delay;
- (9) to develop a report on the previous practices, possible technical options and solutions, including cost-effective, innovative measures and all programme and budgetary implications, to improve the current situation and ensure availability of the essential technical information of the Organization and WHO guidelines, whether in written, audiovisual or digital form in the six official languages, to be submitted for consideration by the Seventy-second World Health Assembly, through the Executive Board at its 144th session.

Seventh plenary meeting, 26 May 2018
A71/VR/7

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