

# Election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization

## Report by the Secretariat

### INTRODUCTION

1. This report provides an overview of the main steps of the process leading to the election of the Director-General with a view to facilitating discussion by the Executive Board.
2. Pursuant to Article 31 of the Constitution, the Director-General is appointed by the World Health Assembly on the nomination by the Board on such terms as the Health Assembly may determine. Rule 52 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board and Rules 107 to 110 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly spell out the process for the nomination and appointment of the Director-General. The term of office of the Director-General shall be five years and he or she shall be eligible for reappointment once only.
3. In addition to the provisions referred to in the preceding paragraph, the Executive Board has adopted a number of decisions related to the criteria that the candidate to be nominated by the Board should fulfill as well as to certain practical aspects of the nomination process, e.g. with reference to the modalities for the establishment of the short list and the interviews of the candidates, as well as the length of the curriculum vitae and supporting material of candidates.<sup>1</sup>

### PROCEDURE FOR NOMINATION OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

4. The overall nomination process, seen from a holistic point of view, can be divided into the following main steps or phases.
5. **Invitation to submit candidatures.** The nomination process begins with the Director-General informing Member States, at least six months before the date fixed for the opening of the session of the Board at which the Director-General is to be nominated, that they may propose persons for nomination by the Board. The deadline for the communication by the Director-General is the middle

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<sup>1</sup> Decision EB100(7) and resolution EB120.R19.

of July, a point halfway between the Health Assembly and the sessions of the regional committees. The process leaves the initiative for proposing candidates entirely with Member States.

6. **Submission of candidatures.** Candidatures may be submitted only by Member States and must be received by the Chairman of the Executive Board not less than two months before the opening of the relevant session of the Executive Board, i.e. approximately by mid-November. Each proposal must enclose a curriculum vitae or other supporting information of no more than 2000 words that should address the criteria established by the Board and include a statement on the vision of the candidate on priorities and strategies. If the Director-General in office wishes to be proposed for a second term, his/her candidature must be submitted by a Member State within the aforementioned deadline. Proposals received from Member States together with the curricula vitae and supporting information are translated into all official languages of the Executive Board and copies dispatched to all Member States one month before the opening of the Board's session. The Chairman of the Board may authorize the Director-General to post on WHO's web site, in addition to the names of the candidates, the curricula vitae and other supporting information as dispatched to Member States, as well as contact information for each candidate unless the candidate or Member State concerned stipulated otherwise.

7. **Campaign phase.** Even though it is difficult to circumscribe the duration of a campaign phase, it can be assumed that it is particularly active from the time of the communication by the Director-General until the nomination by the Board. Campaign activities may consist of bilateral diplomatic contacts, travel by the candidates to relevant Member States, attendance at international events offering opportunities for contacts and visibility, and circulation of information and promotional material on candidates.

8. **Nomination of the Director-General by the Executive Board.** The selection of a candidate by the Board is supported by the **criteria** adopted by the Board at its ninety-seventh session,<sup>1</sup> which the candidate nominated for the post of Director-General should fulfill. The criteria serve as guidance for members of the Board in choosing the candidate to support.

9. The criteria provided in resolution EB97.R10 are the following:

- (1) a strong technical and public health background and extensive experience in international health;
- (2) competency in organizational management;
- (3) proven historical evidence for public health leadership;
- (4) sensitiveness to cultural, social and political differences;
- (5) a strong commitment to the work of WHO;
- (6) the good physical condition required of all staff members of the Organization; and
- (7) sufficient skill in at least one of the official and working languages of the Executive Board and Health Assembly.

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution EB97.R10.

10. The process followed by the Executive Board is divided into a number of steps, summarized below. The whole process is conducted in open meetings of the Board, which may be attended by members of the Board together with their alternates and advisers, one representative for each Member State not represented on the Board, Associate Members and the Secretariat. Representatives of Member States not represented on the Board and of Associate Members may only attend without the right to participate in the meetings. There is no record of the meetings in question.

11. The first main step of the nomination phase is the assessment by the Executive Board whether any candidate does not meet the criteria listed in paragraph 9 above. A candidate may only be eliminated at this stage if there is a consensus among members of the Board that he/she does not meet the criteria. If there is no consensus, the Board proceeds to the next step.

12. The second step of the nomination phase is **the establishment of a short list of five candidates** in case there are more than five candidatures. The short list is established through successive secret ballots during each of which the candidate or candidates receiving the lowest number of votes, as well as any candidates not having received a minimum proportion of the votes cast (set at 10% of the ballot papers), are eliminated. The establishment of the short list can be seen as an efficiency measure which aims at ensuring that only those candidates enjoying a measure of support by the Executive Board may proceed to the next step of the process.

13. The next step of the nomination phase is **the interview of the short-listed candidates**. Each candidate is interviewed for 60 minutes, with the time equally divided between an oral presentation; and a question-and-answer period. Pursuant to the practice followed during the last few nominations, the Board adopts practical modalities that aim to ensure absolute equality of treatment among candidates. One of the arrangements in this connection is a system whereby the Chairman draws randomly questions that have been posed in writing by members of the Board. The intention is to avoid fixed questions that could possibly be leaked to candidates who are interviewed at a later time. Candidates are allotted a maximum of three minutes to answer each question. The modalities aim to strike a balance between an assessment of the candidate's vision for the Organization with a test of his or her ability to respond concisely to unanticipated questions under time pressure.

14. The final step is **the vote by secret ballot to nominate one of the candidates**. Under Rule 52 of the Board's Rules of Procedure, nomination requires a majority of the members present and voting (i.e. abstentions are not counted in the calculation of the required majority). If no candidate receives a majority at the first ballot, further ballots are held to eliminate the candidate who receives the fewest votes. If there is a tie between the two remaining candidates for three consecutive ballots, the procedure shall be resumed on the basis of the original short list. The name of the person nominated by the Executive Board is announced at a public meeting of the Board immediately following the nomination and is submitted, together with a draft contract establishing the terms and conditions of appointment, to the Health Assembly.

## **APPOINTMENT OF THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL BY THE WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

15. The Health Assembly considers the Board's nomination at a private meeting and votes on the appointment by secret ballot. The appointment of the Director-General requires a two thirds majority of the members present and voting. The Health Assembly also approves the contract of appointment, which is signed by the Director-General and by the President of the Health Assembly on behalf of the Organization.

**ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD**

16. The Executive Board is invited to provide further guidance on the improvement of the process for the election of the Director-General of WHO.

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