



## **Method of work of the Health Assembly**

### **Report by the Secretariat**

1. The Health Assembly has periodically reviewed its methods of work, striving constantly to improve its procedures and the organization of its work, to maximize the use of the limited time and resources available for its sessions and to focus its deliberations on the priorities of the Organization. The Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly underwent their last significant revision at the Fiftieth World Health Assembly in 1997 (resolution WHA50.18). Experience gained since then points to the need for additional streamlining of the Rules of Procedure in order to ensure that the limited time available to conduct the business of the Health Assembly can be best used for deliberations on programmatic and technical matters. It also points to other improvements that the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly could undergo to increase the flexibility and coherence of the proceedings, with particular regard to the agenda of the Health Assembly.

#### **COMMITTEE ON NOMINATIONS (RULES 24 AND 25)**

2. Rule 24 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly provides for the membership of the Committee on Nominations, to consist of 24 Members and the outgoing President of the Assembly ex officio. Rule 25 indicates that the purpose of the Committee on Nominations is to propose to the Health Assembly nominations for the offices of the President, five vice-presidents and the chairman of each of the main committees, and for the remaining members of the General Committee; and to propose to each of the main committees nominations for the offices of the vice-chairmen and rapporteur. The President submits an initial list of proposals for consideration by the Committee, to which the members of the Committee can then add their proposals.

3. The Committee on Nominations meets in the morning of the opening day of the Health Assembly. The process of establishing and convening the Committee and of holding its meeting takes up at least one hour of the Health Assembly's time. It also delays the first meeting of the General Committee until the end of the morning, which in turn delays the consideration of the provisional agenda and the organization of work until the afternoon of the first day.

4. The list of proposals submitted by the President originates from consultations held during the regional committees, which allow the Member States of the respective regions to agree on the candidates for the offices for the subsequent Health Assembly. This long-standing and consistent practice, which is based on a predictable and well-accepted regional distribution of the various elective offices, has resulted almost always in elections that have been uncontested, requiring votes by secret ballot only exceptionally in the history of WHO. This consistency of practice has, as a consequence, made the function of the Committee on Nominations marginal and its usefulness questionable.

5. In the light of the foregoing considerations, the Health Assembly may wish to consider abolishing the Committee on Nominations, and consequently deleting Rules 24 and 25 and amending accordingly Rules 26, 31, 34 and 36, which refer to the report of the Committee on Nominations. The Health Assembly may wish to consider that, as is the case for the governing bodies of most organizations in the United Nations (including WHO's Executive Board), the outgoing President should submit a nomination for President and the incoming President should submit nominations for the vice-presidents, the chairmen of the main committees and the members of the General Committee, as well as recommendations for the other officers of the main committees. Such nominations would continue to be based on the recommendations made by the regions. This revision would streamline the opening meetings of the Health Assembly and reduce costs, while maintaining the current system of regional distribution of the Health Assembly's elective offices.

## **CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSALS AND AMENDMENTS BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

6. **Method of voting on two or more proposals (Rule 68).** Rule 68 provides that, if two or more proposals are moved, the Health Assembly shall vote on them starting with the proposal deemed by the President to be furthest removed in substance from the proposal first presented, then on the proposal next removed there from and so on. This method of voting on multiple proposals mirrors the method of voting when two or more amendments are moved to a proposal (Rule 67), whereby the Health Assembly first votes on the amendment deemed by the President to be furthest removed in substance from the original proposal and so on.

7. The method of voting on multiple proposals used by the Health Assembly and the Board is in contrast with the method employed in the rules of procedure of governing bodies of all other United Nations system organizations. The latter rules consistently provide that, if two or more proposals are moved, the body concerned shall vote on the proposals in the order in which they were submitted, i.e. in chronological order. The purpose of amendments, as described in Rule 67, is adding to, deleting from or revising part of a proposal, thus it is logical that voting on them would begin with the amendment furthest removed in substance (i.e. the one that changes most drastically the original proposal). If that amendment is approved, it may render voting on the other proposed amendments unnecessary, as explicitly provided in Rule 67. Proposals, however, raise substantively new issues rather than modify issues contained in previously proposed text. The adoption of different methods of vote on multiple proposals and multiple amendments, respectively, seems therefore logical in view of the very different nature of those motions. The Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly appear to be at this time following an entirely different approach to that taken elsewhere in the United Nations system, for reasons that are difficult to ascertain through the official records of the Health Assembly.

8. In view of the foregoing, the Health Assembly may wish to consider aligning Rule 68 of its Rules of Procedure with the model followed by other United Nations system organizations.

## **AGENDA OF THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

9. A striking feature of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly is that they do not contain a specific rule indicating that the Health Assembly shall adopt its own agenda. This is in contrast with the explicit provision contained in Rule 10bis of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive

Board. The reasons for this omission are difficult to ascertain on the basis of the official records of the Health Assembly.

10. Even though the requirement that the Health Assembly must adopt its agenda in order to conduct its sessions is obvious and can be deduced on the basis of the existing Rules, the Secretariat recommends adding a new Rule 12bis making that requirement explicit so as to avoid any ambiguity. The proposed new Rule follows the formulation of Rule 21 of the Rules of Procedure of the United Nations General Assembly. A reference to Rule 12 would clarify that the Health Assembly will consider the recommendation by the General Committee whether to include in the agenda or not proposals for supplementary items.

11. The Executive Board considered the method of work of the Health Assembly at its 122nd session. After a substantive discussion on the various proposals put forward by the Secretariat, the Board adopted resolution EB122.R8, by which it amended its Rules of Procedure with regard to documentation in support of proposals for agenda items and to decisions by the Board if two or more proposals are moved. The resolution also recommended to the Health Assembly for adoption a draft resolution laying out a number of proposed amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly.

#### **ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

12. The Health Assembly is invited to consider the draft resolution contained in paragraph 2 of resolution EB122.R8.

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