



WHO reform

Implications of reform of the United Nations system

Report by the Director-General

Part I of this report responds to a request of the Executive Board at its 101st session to place an item on United Nations reform, particularly with regard to the implications for WHO, on the agenda of its 102nd session. It outlines the major aspects of the reform process, highlighting those areas of specific importance to WHO. The Executive Board is requested to comment on the issues raised and to give any guidance on how they might be pursued.

Part II of the report concerns a request by the Assembly to consider the functions and role of the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation. The Board is invited to consider a draft resolution on the matter.

PART I. IMPLICATIONS OF UNITED NATIONS REFORM FOR WHO

INTRODUCTION

1. During the course of 1997, the Secretary-General of the United Nations presented a wide range of reform measures. In January of that year the work programme of the United Nations Secretariat was reorganized around the core missions of the United Nations: peace and security, economic and social affairs, development cooperation, humanitarian affairs, and human rights. In March a further set of administrative and budgetary measures were announced, including the integration of departments in the economic and social fields into one, and a series of efficiency measures, *inter alia*, to ensure negative growth in the 1998-1999 budget. In July, these measures were incorporated into a much broader reform programme¹ which was presented to the Fifty-first session of the General Assembly and was subsequently the subject of extensive debate.

2. The General Assembly has to date adopted two resolutions relating to the reform measures,² the first essentially addressing those actions which were within the Secretary-General's own authority to implement, and the second dealing with the recommendations of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly. The latter

¹ Document A51/950 "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform".

² General Assembly resolutions 52/12 and 52/12 B.

involved, *inter alia*, establishment of a post of Deputy Secretary-General, reform of the Economic and Social Council, reform of humanitarian affairs arrangements, close integration of the governance oversight of UNICEF, UNDP and UNFPA, and a number of managerial and financial reforms.

3. In addition to the above, consultations continue to be undertaken between States on reform of the Security Council and its membership. One action the Secretary-General proposes is that the Security Council should consider making sanctions more effective, while limiting collateral damages. He also proposes that it should address the broader humanitarian and economic effects of sanctions, and the objective criteria for their application and termination, an approach advocated by the Director-General of WHO.

4. Longer term measures under debate included designating a “millennium Assembly” in the year 2000, accompanied by a “people’s Assembly”, and reconstituting the Trusteeship Council into a forum for the integrity of the global environment and common areas - oceans, atmosphere and outer space. The General Assembly deferred consideration of these items pending further elaboration from the Secretary-General by the end of March 1998.

5. The measures adopted were primarily directed to the United Nations and its programmes and funds. There were also important implications for specialized agencies, which have already been the subject of review by the Executive Heads of all United Nations agencies, programmes and funds at the last two sessions of ACC, chaired by the Secretary-General.

IMPLICATIONS FOR WHO

6. Aspects of United Nations reform, identified below, have specific implications for WHO’s work, and provide an opportunity to link WHO reform to that of the United Nations, and the United Nations system. A major issue is the interface between the United Nations funds and programmes and the specialized agencies, particularly those working at country level. As the funds and programmes seek to coordinate more closely among themselves, a way should be found of ensuring that the specialized agencies can both participate and fulfil their mandates. This is particularly important for WHO in the case of the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs (ECHA), discussed below.

Special commission

7. There is a proposal to establish a special commission, at ministerial level, to examine possible needs for changes in the Charter of the United Nations and in the treaties from which specialized agencies derived their mandates. The objective is to improve working relationships between the United Nations and the specialized agencies¹ in the interest of Member States. United Nations General Assembly resolution 52/12 B invites the Secretary-General to elaborate further on this proposal by the end of March 1998, for presentation to the General Assembly.

8. The Secretary-General indicated to ACC at its first regular session in 1998 that progress made in arriving at an effective division of labour within the United Nations system and joint action, when required, should obviate the need for constitutional change. He would, therefore, in the report requested by the General Assembly propose that the idea of setting up a special commission might be held in abeyance. The millennium Assembly (year 2000) would be an appropriate forum for taking stock of progress achieved and determining whether the idea needs to be pursued or not.

¹ Article IV of the agreement between the United Nations and WHO deals both with WHO’s response to recommendations emanating from the United Nations, and the Organization’s obligation to cooperate with the specialized agencies and the United Nations.

United Nations structural and institutional reform

9. The new, unified Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) created to reduce fragmentation in the United Nations, deals with wide-ranging social and economic issues that have a bearing on WHO's work. Regional commissions, UNCTAD and UNEP participate in the DESA Executive Committee. DESA provides substantial support to ECOSOC with the help of a dedicated secretariat, within which an interagency affairs secretariat has been established to service ACC and its Organizational Committee. The Secretary-General's request that the interagency affairs secretariat should be reinforced by staff seconded from specialized agencies is receiving active consideration by WHO. The Organization also participates actively in the ACC Interagency Committee on Sustainable Development and maintains strong relations with its secretariat in DESA. In general, the Organization attempts to liaise effectively with DESA, especially in areas linked to health and other aspects of social development.

Development cooperation and country-level coordination

10. A most important aspect of United Nations reform for WHO is integration of United Nations activities at country level into a strengthened Resident Coordinator system. The process is led by **UNDG**, chaired by the UNDP Administrator, and comprising the major United Nations funds and programmes (UNICEF, WFP, UNFPA, UNDCP), departments and other relevant entities, including UNAIDS. The High Commissioner for Human Rights, UNCTAD, IFAD and a representative of the regional commissions are invited to become members. The Executive Committee of UNDG, comprising UNICEF, UNDP, WFP and UNFPA, provides a forum for joint policy decisions and is serviced by a distinct secretariat. The principal objectives of UNDG are to promote a unified United Nations presence in countries, and to strengthen policy coherence and cost-effectiveness of United Nations development operations by reducing duplication and pooling resources and services. The funds and programmes will, however, retain their current distinctiveness and existing structures of accountability. Major tasks include overseeing preparation, review and evaluation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), ensuring its use as the common framework for formulating country programmes; strengthening the Resident Coordinator system; promoting establishment in countries of a "UN House" with common services; and strengthening cooperation with international financial institutions.

11. The only specialized body invited to participate in UNDG is IFAD, regarded as a fund with field operations. WHO is concerned that UNDG, by virtue of its membership, will make decisions on a wide spectrum of development issues in which health will undoubtedly figure largely. WHO will need to decide on the best strategy for liaising with the Group, taking into account the Organization's mandate to ensure that health policies established by the Health Assembly are respected and that health programmes are implemented under WHO guidance.

12. WHO and other specialized agencies have, on the other hand, been invited to participate in **UNDAF**, as an instrument for promoting teamwork and for achieving goal-oriented collaboration, programmatic coherence and mutual reinforcement. Eighteen pilot countries (see table below) have been identified for testing UNDAF. In response to an invitation by the Secretary-General for the specialized agencies to participate in the UNDAF exercise, WHO designated an UNDAF focal point, and WHO Representatives have been encouraged to participate within the Resident Coordinator system in a 10-step process to prepare the UNDAF document. A detailed report on the outcome of the pilot phase of UNDAF will be presented to the Executive Board at its 103rd session.

UNDAF PILOT COUNTRIES

Africa	Asia	Arab States	Latin America	Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States
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Ghana Kenya Madagascar (LDC) Malawi (LDC) Mali (LDC) Mozambique (LDC) Namibia Senegal South Africa Zimbabwe	India Philippines Viet Nam	Morocco	Colombia Guatemala	Romania Turkey
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Humanitarian affairs and emergencies

13. United Nations General Assembly resolution 52/12 B designates the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator, who will also retain responsibility for natural disaster relief. UNDP will be responsible for operational activities for natural disaster mitigation, prevention and preparedness. The Secretary-General has approved a new structure to replace the Department of Humanitarian Affairs with a smaller, more focused Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and with an Executive Committee (ECHA), comprised of United Nations entities. The newly appointed head of OCHA has written to the Director-General explaining that the adjustments made aim at bringing the parts of the offices dealing with complex emergencies closer to one another and to the operational agencies in Geneva, while retaining a stronger capacity in New York for liaison with those bodies based in the United States.

14. WHO gives strong support to the Secretary-General's action to streamline and increase efficiency in humanitarian affairs and has enhanced the Organization's capacity to discharge its responsibilities, particularly through its specific technical expertise. To fulfil its functions, WHO has to participate as a full partner in the elaboration of emergency response programmes from the outset. In this context, the use of reliable health data is essential, together with accurate country-based assessments, a realistic health response strategy, sound technical support, and advice for operating agencies. However, there are concerns that the new structures may exclude the specialized agencies at certain stages, and the Director-General is in communication with the United Nations on this matter.

Policies, programmes, management

Drug control, crime prevention, international terrorism

15. The United Nations office at Vienna has become the locus for efforts against crime, drugs and terrorism. The Centre for International Crime Prevention has been (re)established to deal with terrorism, money laundering and trafficking in women and children, while UNDCP focuses on drug trafficking and drug control, including prevention, rehabilitation and reduction of illicit supplies. A common managerial structure has been established under the new Executive Director.

Personnel issues

16. The United Nations Assistant Secretary-General for Human Resources Management presented a proposal in early February to the Secretary-General and his cabinet to renew United Nations personnel policies by simplifying the rules and making the system more flexible and fair. This was unanimously supported and a task force of experts was appointed. The General Assembly also decided to examine the Secretary-General's recommendation to review the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC). It requested competent intergovernmental bodies to consider the modalities of this review and report to the Assembly before the end of its session. WHO supports the measures being taken to prepare a review of ICSC. A draft Code of Conduct for

United Nations staff was submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-second session which agreed, in resolution 52/12 B, to expedite its consideration. The implications of the draft Code are being studied by WHO and other specialized agencies.

Budgeting and financing

17. The General Assembly took note in resolution 52/12 B of the Secretary-General's recommendation to move toward "results-based" budgeting and to shift from micro-management to macro-accountability, and requested a more detailed report before the end of its current session. WHO has informed the Secretary-General that its own "results-based" budgeting developed over the past two bienniums continues to be strongly supported by Member States, and that this experience can be shared with the United Nations. The General Assembly also reaffirmed the obligation of all Member States to pay their assessed contributions in full, on time, and without conditions. It took note of the proposal to establish a United Nations revolving credit fund and requested further details; it also noted the recommendation to retain unspent balances, and referred this to competent bodies to consider appropriate use of such balances.

Civil society

18. The increasing influence of civil society on the United Nations system is acknowledged in the reform programme. All substantive divisions of the United Nations have designated a liaison officer for nongovernmental organizations, and a growing relationship with the business community is advocated. Gatherings of eminent leaders, academicians, organized labour, nongovernmental organizations, private sector, youth, and foundations have been initiated. ACC discussed the relationship between the United Nations system, civil society and the private sector at its second session in 1997 and concluded, *inter alia*, that policies of the United Nations system for interaction with civil society vary depending on the nature of the partner organizations and type of activity. It was pointed out by WHO and others that this cooperation had generally been fruitful, although it had, on occasion, required caution in order to avoid potential conflicts of interests. Non-State participation in the work of the United Nations system should be the subject of intensified exchanges of information between agencies. WHO will contribute to a study on an interagency liaison service for cooperation with the business community.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

19. The Executive Board may wish to comment on the various issues raised in this report and to give its guidance on how they might be pursued.

PART II. FUNCTIONS AND ROLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE ON THE EFFECTS OF ATOMIC RADIATION (UNSCEAR)

1. On 10 December 1997, the United Nations General Assembly adopted without a vote, resolution 52/55 entitled “Effects of atomic radiation”, whose operative paragraph 9 reads as follows:

9. [The General Assembly] *Invites the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization to consider the functions and role of the [United Nations] Scientific Committee [on the Effects of Atomic Radiation] and to submit a recommendation to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session, and, meanwhile, requests the Scientific Committee to submit its report to the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization, as well as to the General Assembly, which will consider the report together with the evaluation of the report by the International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Health Organization.*

2. This resolution is linked to the reform process of the United Nations system as endorsed by the General Assembly in resolution 51/241, entitled “Strengthening of the United Nations” adopted on 31 July 1997.

3. The Director-General, in consultation with IAEA, has carefully reviewed the request of the General Assembly contained in resolution 52/55, and has evaluated the work of UNSCEAR, particularly its relationship with WHO.¹ The consultation can be summarized as follows.

4. UNSCEAR was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1955 in order to evaluate levels of ionizing radiation and radioactivity in the environment and the health effects of ionizing radiation. This happened at the time of the testing of nuclear weapons in the atmosphere, which caused great concern in many countries. Today, the major aims of UNSCEAR’s work are to assess the consequences to human health of a wide range of doses of ionizing radiation and to estimate the dose to people all over the world from natural and man-made radiation sources.

5. Analysis of the activities UNSCEAR has carried out during the past 43 years shows that the Committee, from the WHO point of view, has provided valuable contributions to understanding the mechanisms of the health effects of ionizing radiation, drawing up basic safety standards, improving the use of ionizing radiation in medicine, and promoting radiation protection programmes at national and international levels. UNSCEAR keeps its leading role as the only international committee providing comprehensive evaluation of the effects of ionizing radiation.

6. WHO and UNSCEAR activities in the field of evaluation of the health effects of ionizing radiation are complementary and not competitive. Both organizations have always paid due attention to the assessment of radiation effects on humans and their offspring, environmental radioactivity and its possible health implications. In this context, UNSCEAR provides general assessment of world-wide information regarding sources, levels and effects of ionizing radiation. This assessment also includes relevant WHO reports and publications. WHO concentrates its attention on such matters as assessment of the health impacts of the application of nuclear technology, comparison of these impacts with outputs of other technologies used for health purposes, evaluation of health implications of nuclear power, and prevention or mitigation of hazardous health effects of ionizing radiation. WHO’s activities in radiation protection are, however, not restricted to the evaluation of health effects. They deal with a broad spectrum of problems such as development of basic radiation protection standards, diagnosis of overexposure and treatment of radiation injuries, medical supervision of radiation workers, radiation protection of patients and personnel in hospitals, medical handling of radiation emergencies, etc. The primary aim of WHO in the field of radiation protection is to improve radiation protection services at national and international levels. UNSCEAR assessments provide a basis for achieving this goal.

¹ Document EHG/98.15, available on request.

7. UNSCEAR operates as an independent scientific board within the framework of the United Nations system. It directly reports to the General Assembly. However, as part of the process to reform the United Nations system, General Assembly resolution 52/55, requested UNSCEAR to submit its next report to WHO and IAEA, as well as to the Assembly, which will consider it together with an evaluation of the report by WHO and IAEA.

8. The possibility of merging the secretariats of UNSCEAR and IAEA was considered by the General Assembly in 1991.¹ However, IAEA felt that UNSCEAR should preserve full independence, because the mandates of these two institutions were quite distinct. This position was supported by UNSCEAR, which reported to the Assembly in June 1992 that alternative arrangements for its secretariat might well prejudice the perception of both its authority and its independence.

9. It is recommended that the United Nations General Assembly should maintain the present functions and independent scientific role of UNSCEAR, including the present reporting arrangements. It is further recommended that should the United Nations General Assembly decide otherwise, the Secretary-General should consult WHO prior to any such decision in order to consider other institutional arrangements, such as a WHO/IAEA joint scientific committee.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

10. The Executive Board is invited to adopt the following resolution:

The Executive Board,

Noting United Nations General Assembly resolution 52/55 adopted on 10 December 1997;

Having reviewed the report of the Director-General;²

Appreciating the work of UNSCEAR, which is of great relevance to the protection and promotion of human health,

1. RECOMMENDS that the present functions and independent scientific role of UNSCEAR, including the present reporting arrangements, should be maintained;

2. FURTHER RECOMMENDS that the World Health Organization should be consulted prior to any decision not to maintain the present functions and role of UNSCEAR, in order to consider other institutional arrangements, such as a WHO/IAEA joint scientific committee;

3. REQUESTS the Director-General to transmit this resolution to the United Nations Secretary-General.

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¹ General Assembly resolution 46/185 C.

² Document EB102/6.