



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

EXECUTIVE BOARD
103rd Session
Supplementary agenda item

EB103/35
25 January 1999

Reform of the World Health Assembly

Report by the Secretariat

BACKGROUND

1. In response to the request to add a supplementary agenda item to the agenda of the 104th session of the Executive Board,¹ the Secretariat, in consultation with the Chairman of the Board, has prepared this report to assist the Board in its deliberations on one aspect of the work of the Health Assembly, namely, the interworking of high-level policy-makers participating in governing bodies.

2. Article 18(d) of the Constitution of WHO stipulates that one of the functions of the Health Assembly shall be to review and approve reports and activities of the Director-General. Rule 5 of the Rules of Procedure of the Health Assembly further specify that the agenda of the Health Assembly shall include the annual report of the Director-General on the work of the Organization.

3. The Health Assembly has so far considered the annual report of the Director-General in plenary meetings and, in general, the chief delegate has addressed the plenary. The arrangements for the general discussion in plenary meetings on the annual report of the Director-General were defined by the Health Assembly in 1967.² In 1997, the Health Assembly approved new arrangements for the conduct of this discussion in plenary meetings, as follows:

- delegates are requested to limit to five minutes their statements in such discussions;
- delegates wishing to do so may submit prepared statements of not more than 600 words for inclusion in the verbatim records of the plenary meetings;
- the statements should focus on the theme of *The world health report*.³

ISSUES

4. In recent years, organizations of the United Nations system have established mechanisms to facilitate the interworking of high-level policy-makers participating in their governing bodies. Examples are the high-level segment of the Economic and Social Council and the WTO ministerial meeting. The Executive

¹ See document EB103/1 Add.1.

² Resolution WHA20.2.

³ Resolution WHA50.18.

Board has also expressed concern that the present format for discussion of the annual report of the Director-General does not lend itself to a meaningful policy debate.¹

5. The Health Assembly provides an ideal forum to debate and exchange ideas on themes of the day. In order to make better use of this forum and to establish a format that is lively, interesting, and useful to Member States, the Secretariat and the general public, arrangements for the conduct of the general discussion could be redefined, as follows:

- chief delegates would be invited to participate in, say, one of two high-level meetings of the Health Assembly, which would be held over two meetings of the plenary;
- each high-level meeting would focus on one or two themes contained in the annual report of the Director-General, which would be announced when the provisional agenda for the Health Assembly is prepared by the Executive Board;
- at each high-level meeting a renowned international figure would deliver the key-note address on the selected theme;
- debate and interchange of ideas would be encouraged during the meetings.

6. Any new arrangements would need to be considered by the Fifty-second World Health Assembly in May 1999. It would be possible, however, as an interim measure, to incorporate in the timetable for the Fifty-second World Health Assembly a one-half day session organized along the lines described above, in addition to a discussion of the annual report of the Director-General in plenary, in accordance with current procedures.

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¹ See document EB97/1996/REC/2, pp. 220-221.