

WHO reform

Written statements: guidelines for Member States

1. At its 145th session in May 2019, the Executive Board considered draft guidelines to be applied before posting written statements by Member States on the dedicated website¹ and requested that the Secretariat update the draft guidelines in line with the concerns and comments expressed by Member States during the session.² Furthermore, the Secretariat was invited to consider introducing a trial period for implementation of the guidelines, once adopted.²
2. The Secretariat sought information on the guidance and/or practices in place in other intergovernmental organizations regarding the submission of written statements by their members, both in the context of governing body sessions and more generally. Feedback in this regard was received from the secretariats of 19 organizations.³ A summary is provided in Annex 2.
3. The feedback received does not seem to suggest that a uniform practice is in place and consistently applied across other intergovernmental organizations with respect to written statements submitted by their members. At the same time, it is possible to identify some aspects with respect to which several organizations follow similar practices. These include: the absence of a right of reply to written statements; the non-inclusion of the organization's logo on the statements submitted by members; and the absence of formal mechanisms to handle potential complaints relating to written statements.
4. Taking into account the above, the Secretariat has revised the draft guidelines for the Board's consideration. The revised guidelines are presented in Annex 1.

ACTION BY THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

5. The Executive Board is invited to consider the revised draft guidelines contained in Annex 1.

¹ Document EB145/5.

² See the summary records of the Executive Board at its 145th session, second meeting.

³ Specifically, the European Space Agency, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, FAO, the International Criminal Court, IFAD, ILO, IOM, ITU, OECD, UN, UNDP/UNFPA/UNOPS Executive Board, UNESCO, UNIDO, UPU, WFP, WIPO, WMO, the World Bank Group and WTO.

6. Subject to any further guidance that the Board may wish to provide, the Board is also invited to consider the following draft decision:

The Executive Board, having considered the report on WHO reform, decided:

- (1) that the guidelines contained in Annex 1 to the report on WHO reform¹ will be applied on a trial basis from the closure of the 146th session of the Executive Board until the closure of the 149th session of the Executive Board;
- (2) to request the Director-General to report on the use of the guidelines to the Executive Board at its 149th session.

¹ EB146/31.

ANNEX 1

**REVISED DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR WRITTEN STATEMENTS RELATING TO
MEETINGS OF THE WHO GOVERNING BODIES TO BE POSTED ON THE
DEDICATED WHO WEBPAGE**

The following guidelines apply to written statements by Member States, relating to meetings of the World Health Assembly and Executive Board, to be posted on the dedicated WHO webpage.

1. Written statements are made available for information purposes. They are intended to stimulate debate and enable delegations to complement their oral interventions during the meetings of the WHO governing bodies. For example, they may expand upon the information provided by the Member State concerned during the discussion or may describe country experiences relevant to the agenda item concerned. Written statements may be submitted independently from the delivery of an oral intervention during the meeting, provided that they relate to an item on the agenda.
2. Member States may submit written statements by sending them to the following email address: statements@who.int. Statements intended for oral delivery must be submitted separately to the email address: interpret@who.int.
3. Written statements may be submitted until the closure of the relevant session of the Health Assembly or Executive Board. Such statements will remain published until the closure of the relevant body's equivalent session two years later. Statements submitted after the closure of the relevant session of the Health Assembly or Executive Board will not be accepted.
4. For readability purposes, Member States are invited to limit their statements, as well as statements submitted on behalf of a region or group of countries, to 500 words and 800 words, respectively.
5. Each statement should clearly identify:
 - (a) the Member State submitting it or, in the event of regional statements, the region or group of countries on behalf of which the statement is submitted; and
 - (b) the governing body session and specific agenda item to which the statement relates.
6. Written statements should contain text only. No photographs, diagrams, maps or other media materials may be included.
7. Written statements may be provided in any of the six WHO official languages (Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish) and will be published in the format and language of submission. Member States may provide translations of their written statements into one or more of WHO official languages, if they so wish. Such translations should be clearly marked with the words "unofficial translation".
8. Member States assume full responsibility for the content of their statements.
9. Written statements should address the agenda item in respect of which they are submitted. They must not include any offensive language, including with respect to other Member States.

10. The opportunity to post written statements on the dedicated webpage is without prejudice to the content of Member States' oral interventions during the meetings of the WHO governing bodies.

11. Written statements do not replace or supplement the official records of the relevant meetings of the WHO governing bodies and do not constitute official WHO documents. The official records of meetings of the WHO governing bodies are exclusively based on statements delivered orally during the meeting, not the content of any written statement that the delegation concerned may have also submitted. The official records constitute the exclusive authoritative record of proceedings.

12. The WHO logo will not appear on the statements but will appear on the webpage where the statements are posted.¹

¹ The draft guidelines presented to the Board at its 145th session in document EB145/5 included the following provision on a right of reply in writing:

11. *“Any Member State may exercise a right of reply in writing to a written statement posted on the dedicated webpage. Member States wishing to exercise such right should:*

- (a) submit their statement of reply as soon as possible after the statement to which they wish to reply has been posted and, in any case, no later than two working days after the closure of the relevant WHO governing body session;*
- (b) clearly indicate that their statement is a statement of reply;*
- (c) ensure that any such statement is as brief as possible and, in any case, does not exceed the general word limit set out under paragraph 3 above.*

Notwithstanding the above, the provisions relating to the right of reply as set out in the rules of procedure of the Health Assembly and Executive Board do not extend to written statements posted on the dedicated webpage.”

This provision was not included in these draft guidelines, following an analysis of feedback received from other intergovernmental organizations.

ANNEX 2

SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK RECEIVED FROM OTHER INTERGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS REGARDING WRITTEN STATEMENTS SUBMITTED BY THEIR MEMBERS

Opportunity for Members to submit written statements

1. All respondent organizations have reported the existence of rules and practices in place relating to the submission of written statements by their Members, although to different extents and under different conditions:

(a) In the United Nations General Assembly, copies of statements delivered in plenary meetings and meetings of the main committees, once delivered, are posted on an electronic portal. Furthermore, the General Assembly has recognized the right of Member States to request circulation of communications as official documents.

(b) In some cases, there are practices specific to statements intended for the general debate taking place during the relevant governing body session. In one organization, all statements delivered during the general debate are posted on the website unless otherwise indicated by the State concerned, and States are invited to participate in the debate by submitting written statements only. In another organization, only statements delivered by members during the general debate are posted on the organization's website after delivery, on the dedicated page of the session, unless otherwise indicated by the member. Elsewhere, new procedures were introduced in 2018 whereby Member States may either submit a pre-recorded video statement, or record a video statement at an on-site studio during the relevant governing body session, or submit the statement in text form.

(c) In certain cases, written statements submitted by members are distributed to all delegations, provided that certain conditions are met. Other organizations provide, more generally, for the possibility to submit written statements relating to governing body sessions for publication on the organization's website or for inclusion in the formal record of the relevant governing body session.

Languages

2. Several respondent organizations reported that written statements are posted in the language of delivery or submission only. Elsewhere, they are required to be accompanied by an English translation.

3. In the United Nations General Assembly, statements issued as official documents of the General Assembly are, as a rule, translated into all six official languages of the United Nations, even though exceptions may occur on a case-by-case basis with the consent of the Member State concerned. In other cases, statements are translated by the secretariat into the official or working languages of the organization as a result of their inclusion in the official records or report of the session.

Web-posting and relationship vis-à-vis the official records of meetings

4. In some cases, written statements are posted for a period, which may be definite or indefinite, on the organization's website and do not constitute part of the official records of the meeting. In other cases,

written statements are not made public separately; instead, they are annexed to the official summary records of the session, if so requested by the submitting Member State. In some organizations, such statements are published on a dedicated webpage and referenced in the summary of the proceedings or reproduced in the report of the meeting as if orally delivered. Elsewhere, they are published as part of the report of the relevant governing body session, available on the organization's website. In the United Nations, statements submitted for circulation as official documents of the General Assembly are made available through the central repository for United Nations parliamentary documents.

Right of reply

5. Most respondent organizations did not report the existence of any formal mechanism to exercise any right of reply to written statements submitted by their members.

Organization logo

6. In several respondent organizations, while the logo of the organization does not appear on statements submitted by members, it does appear on the organization's webpage where the statements are posted. In some cases, written statements submitted by members are annexed to, or referenced in, the report or documents of the relevant governing body session bearing the organization's logo. Furthermore, in the United Nations General Assembly, communications submitted by Member States and published as official documents of the General Assembly bear the United Nations logo like any other official document.

Mechanisms to handle potential complaints

7. No respondent organizations reported the existence of official mechanisms to handle potential complaints relating to written statements submitted by their members. In some organizations, concerns relating to written statements, if any, may be brought to the attention of the secretariat or presiding officer of the meeting and are handled on an ad-hoc basis.

Role of the secretariat

8. The secretariat's role in this regard mainly consists in facilitating the submission and dissemination of written statements submitted by the members, in accordance with each organization's rules and practice. Depending on the organization, key responsibilities include: receiving and collecting the statements; providing for their translation; ensuring their distribution to members and publication on the organization's website.

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