

PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE SECOND MEETING

**WHO headquarters, Geneva
Monday, 16 November 2020, scheduled at 14:00**

Chair: Dr H. VARDHAN (India)

CONTENTS

	Page
Pillar 4: More effective and efficient WHO providing better support to countries	
1. Staffing matters	
Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations.....	2
2. Matters for information: report on meetings of expert committees and study groups.....	3
3. Future sessions of the Executive Board and the Health Assembly	4
4. Closure of the session.....	5

SECOND MEETING

Monday, 16 November 2020, at 14:10

Chair: Dr H. VARDHAN (India)

PILLAR 4: MORE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT WHO PROVIDING BETTER SUPPORT TO COUNTRIES

1. STAFFING MATTERS: Item 6 of the agenda

Statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations: Item 6.1 of the agenda (document EB147/INF./1)

The CHAIR drew attention to the statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations contained in document EB147/INF./1 and paragraphs 34 to 37 of the report of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board contained in document EB147/2.

The representative of the WHO STAFF ASSOCIATIONS, speaking on behalf of the staff associations of WHO, PAHO, UNAIDS and IARC, expressed solidarity with all communities affected by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The global crisis had shown that rapid transformational change and strong international collaboration were possible and had highlighted the importance of WHO's role, especially in health systems strengthening. She welcomed the senior management team's efforts to increase flexibility and expressed gratitude to the Director-General for remaining available to staff members.

She expressed the hope that the Secretariat would fulfil its pledge to ensure that the WHO transformation, which should be evaluated by an independent external body at some future point, did not result in job losses at regional and country offices and that the process would be shorter than it had been at WHO headquarters.

Trust in WHO's internal justice system was contingent upon its efficiency, effectiveness and accessibility by all WHO staff at all duty stations. It was unacceptable that case investigations and resolutions still took, on average, more than a year to complete. WHO should allocate sufficient resources to strengthen its internal justice system, especially its investigative functions, bearing in mind that increasing human resources alone would not improve performance. Internal justice structures such as the Office of Internal Oversight Services should be subject to the same level of accountability as the rest of the Organization through the formulation of a clear workplan and timelines for investigations and the establishment and monitoring of key performance indicators. Member States should engage in closer oversight through the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee, which should be afforded sufficient resources to hire an external party to continuously audit the Office's investigative functions.

With regard to the mobility policy, she expressed appreciation for the recently launched mobility simulation exercise but remained concerned about a number of aspects related to the policy's functioning. The mobility policy should only be implemented once the relevant support and implementation mechanisms had been established, and mobility opportunities should first be offered to those staff members who were due to relocate and were most keen to do so, after which relocation should be determined based on clear criteria that were available to all staff.

She expressed appreciation for the Secretariat's efforts to improve staff health insurance services, particularly the pilot initiative to expand health care coverage to include more health-care providers in the African and Eastern Mediterranean regions. That initiative should be extended to other regions. She

also welcomed the decision to expand the number of staff representatives on the staff health insurance Global Oversight Committee. Increasing recognition of WHO staff health insurance among health care providers would ensure that WHO staff, and particularly country-based staff, had access to health care when needed.

She welcomed the Secretariat's decision to combine all forms of harassment in a single document on respectful workplaces and to take account of comments from the staff associations when establishing the policy. She also expressed appreciation that staff representatives would form part of the newly established team focusing on diversity and inclusion at WHO headquarters, and looked forward to its final recommendations. Lastly, she welcomed the establishment of the working group on flexible working arrangements, set up in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and hoped that it would promptly issue its final recommendations, which should be taken into consideration when updating the mobility policy.

The representative of AUSTRALIA expressed gratitude to all WHO staff members for their dedication and tireless work, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a shared responsibility to listen to staff members, resolve their concerns and ensure that the Organization was a safe, enabling environment that was free of discrimination and harassment and underpinned by strong internal justice systems. She therefore endorsed the relevant recommendations of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee. Given the significant overlap between the current agenda item and the annual report on human resources, the Committee should consider combining them into a single agenda item, rather than separating one item for the Health Assembly and one for the Executive Board.

The representative of the NETHERLANDS¹ said that the transformation process should be implemented across all levels of WHO to achieve the Organization's goals and should undergo an independent evaluation at an appropriate time. She called on the Secretariat to submit a report to the 148th session of the Executive Board on the financial resources required to make the necessary improvements to the internal justice system and to facilitate a detailed discussion on accountability and oversight during that session of the Board. The lessons learned over recent months concerning teleworking should be included in an updated policy on flexible working arrangements. She paid tribute to WHO staff for their efforts to respond to the pandemic while ensuring the continuation of other WHO programmes.

The Board noted the statement by the representative of the WHO staff associations.

2. MATTERS FOR INFORMATION: REPORT ON MEETINGS OF EXPERT COMMITTEES AND STUDY GROUPS: Item 7 of the agenda (document EB147/9)

The representative of GABON, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, reiterated the importance of pharmacopoeias, quality pharmaceutical products and food safety for the resilience of health systems. She noted with satisfaction the guidelines and decisions adopted, in particular those on good manufacturing practices for pharmaceutical products, the implementation of quality management systems for national regulatory authorities, and the assessment of the quality, safety and efficacy of vaccines. The Secretariat should provide more support to Member States to implement the External Quality Assurance Assessment Scheme and to continue updating the WHO certification scheme on the quality of pharmaceutical products. She requested further information on the general aspects of risk assessment and the specific evaluations of veterinary drugs to help Member States to

¹ Participating by virtue of Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.

improve food safety, and encouraged the Secretariat to support regional and country efforts to raise public awareness of the risks related to psychoactive substances and drug abuse.

The representative of BANGLADESH urged the Secretariat to implement the recommendations of the expert committees and study groups. He called on WHO and other development partners to help low- and middle-income countries to build infrastructure to ensure robust vaccine and medicine distribution networks, and emphasized the need for regulatory guidelines on multisource medicines for global use in order to facilitate access to quality medicines for all. Implementation of the recommendations of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives would encourage fair practices in the global food trade and improve national and regional food safety standards.

The representative of COLOMBIA said that WHO should strive to incorporate the recommendations of the expert committees and study groups into its programmes and work with other organizations in the United Nations system to fulfil any recommendations that reached beyond its remit, putting people and health at the centre of the decision-making process. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the discussions and recommendations of the Expert Committee on Biological Standardization deserved special attention and the Organization's full support.

The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL (Universal Health Coverage/Healthier Populations) said that implementation of the recommendations of the Joint FAO/WHO Expert Committee on Food Additives was a core part of WHO's collaboration with FAO on programmes such as the Codex Alimentarius. The Secretariat would work with Member States to update the WHO global strategy for food safety and to implement the recommendations of the Expert Committee at the country level.

The COORDINATOR (Access to Medicines and Health Products) noted the request made by the representative of Bangladesh for support in improving supply chain management and procurement, including for COVID-19-related medicines. Concerning the Expert Committee on Drug Dependence, the Secretariat was working to enhance collaboration in addressing the world drug problem, in line with decision WHA70(18) (2017), by ensuring that information was shared between the Expert Committee, UNODC and INCB.

The Board noted the report.

3. FUTURE SESSIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY:
Item 8 of the agenda (document EB147/10)

The CHAIR, recalling that the Board had adopted decisions EB147(6), EB147(7) and EB147(8) at its *de minimis* session in May 2020, invited Board members to consider the format of the thirty-third meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee and the 148th session of the Executive Board, to be held in January 2021.

The DIRECTOR (Governing Bodies) said that, in the light of the current epidemiological situation, the meetings to be held in January 2021 would likely go ahead in hybrid or virtual format. He invited the Board to give its views on those two options, in particular regarding a deadline by which the Secretariat should inform Member States of the final arrangements.

The representative of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA said that, considering the current circumstances, the Secretariat should plan to hold virtual meetings of the Programme, Budget and

Administration Committee and the Executive Board in January 2021, but expressed the hope that meetings scheduled for later in 2021 would be able to go ahead in person. The modalities for those meetings should be finalized by mid-December 2020. Since Member States in the Region of the Americas and the Western Pacific Region had encountered difficulties owing to the scheduling of meetings in Central European Time, the Secretariat should consider adapting the schedules for upcoming meetings in order to share that burden across regions.

He expressed strong support for efforts to strengthen WHO and looked forward to discussing those critical issues at the upcoming sessions of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee and the Executive Board. Further intersessional discussions should be scheduled with Member States in that regard; in particular, he supported the proposal for an Executive Board retreat, which would strengthen the Board's governance and leadership within WHO. Lastly, he suggested that the way in which progress reports were examined should be reconsidered, since Member States were often unable to give them their due attention.

The representative of the UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND said that the Secretariat should make the decision to hold a virtual meeting as soon as possible to allow time for Member States to prepare.

The representative of the RUSSIAN FEDERATION said that the 148th session of the Executive Board and Seventy-fourth World Health Assembly should be held in either virtual or hybrid format, given the current epidemiological situation, and expressed his preference for the hybrid option.

The DIRECTOR (Governing Bodies) said that the Officers of the Board would discuss the format of the 148th session of the Executive Board and keep Member States informed in a timely manner.

4. CLOSURE OF THE SESSION: Item 9 of the agenda

The DIRECTOR-GENERAL thanked the Chair for his leadership, Member States for their input and guidance, and the staff of the Secretariat for their hard work to make the meeting a success. He hoped that a Board retreat would take place before the 148th session of the Executive Board.

After the customary exchange of courtesies, the CHAIR declared the resumed 147th session of the Executive Board closed.

The meeting rose at 15:20.

= = =