
PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE THIRD MEETING

**WHO headquarters, Geneva
Tuesday, 31 January 2023, scheduled at 10:00**

Chair: Dr K. V. PETRIČ (Slovenia)

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THIRD MEETING

Tuesday, 31 January 2023, at 10:10

Chair: Dr K. V. PETRIČ (Slovenia)

1. **REPORT OF THE PROGRAMME, BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD:** Item 4 of the agenda (document EB152/4)

The CHAIR reminded the Board that the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board had considered items on the agenda for the current session of the Board. The Board would be invited to consider the Committee's recommendations on each relevant agenda item as it came under discussion by the Board.

The representative of MALDIVES, speaking in her capacity as Chair of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board, said that the Committee had made a number of recommendations to the Board, including with regard to: the recommendations of the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Programmatic, Financial and Budgetary Governance; the Secretariat's implementation plan on reform; the outcome of the consultations with Member States on the report of the Director-General on extending the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 to 2025; the extension of the temporary suspension of Financial Rule XII, 112.1, in part; engagement with non-State actors; the scale of assessments for 2024–2025; amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules; the housing allowance for the Director-General; and amendments to the Staff Regulations and Staff Rules.

The Committee had also considered and noted the report of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee and had proposed that the Secretariat should continue its work to implement the recommendations contained in the report. It had requested the Advisory Committee to continue its work to finalize the process for handling potential allegations against the Executive Head of the Organization and to initiate work to develop the process for handling potential allegations against the Director of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, drawing as appropriate from existing processes in other relevant United Nations forums and Member State input, with an initial draft to be delivered to the thirty-eighth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee in the year 2023.

The representative of the RUSSIAN FEDERATION said that the way in which the report of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee was considered prevented Member States from discussing important issues raised therein. Every year, confusion arose within the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee as to which elements of that report could be discussed and it was unacceptable that certain subjects had not been properly discussed by the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee. The Advisory Committee and the Secretariat should give careful consideration to the way in which the reports of the Advisory Committee were presented for consideration to ensure that its work served the best interests of Member States, which were financing its activities through their contributions. The Advisory Committee should provide regular briefings to Member States, in line with best practices of the United Nations system.

The representative of ETHIOPIA, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, welcomed WHO's efforts and commitment to improve impact at the country level and build an agile, proactive and sustainably financed Organization. She appreciated the work of the Agile Member States Task Group and expressed support for the extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work,

2019–2023 to 2025, as well as for the proposed guidance for the Secretariat’s implementation of existing mandates.

The proposed allocation of 50% of the base segment to countries envisaged in the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 should be further increased to cover the human and financial resources needed to adequately address health needs, the impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and emerging health challenges. Immediate action to address the programme budget imbalance and uneven financing constituted a key governance reform and a precondition for an increase in assessed contributions. She urged all stakeholders to continue providing flexible funding, which should be distributed to countries first, and requested the Secretariat to monitor and report annually on progress in that regard.

The Director-General should increase the share of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 allocated to countries and regions according to an agreed phased timeline for 2024–2027 with a view to achieving the triple billion targets, working towards the “five Ps” and delivering impact at the country level by 2025. The Member States of the African Region welcomed the Secretariat’s proposal and principles to ensure equitable resource allocation. A set of specific indicators, schedule of reporting to the Board and measures should be included in the Secretariat’s implementation plan on reform to ensure that the needs of Member States were met in an equitable manner.

Noting the importance of measures to ensure accountability and timely action, she urged the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee to finalize the process for handling potential allegations against the Executive Head of the Organization, taking into account the comments and suggestions of Member States, and to report thereon to the thirty-eighth meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee. She requested clarification regarding the implications of amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules on implementation and decision-making. Further consultations should be held before the draft resolution on amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules contained in document EB152/30 was submitted for consideration by the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly.

The representative of BRAZIL welcomed the recommendations of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee and reiterated his Government’s support for a WHO that was stronger, more sustainable, effective, efficient, fit for purpose and representative of the needs and perspectives of Member States. Matters addressed by the Committee, including the extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 to 2025, the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025, the work of the Agile Member States Task Group and the proposal for a replenishment mechanism, should be evaluated and considered as a complete reform package. Member States and the Secretariat should reaffirm their commitment to paving the way to greater transparency, accountability and good governance. He praised the Secretariat’s determination to respond quickly to comments made during the Committee’s meeting and called for prompt action to be taken on the requests made by delegations with a view to ensuring strong support for an ambitious reform package at the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly.

The representative of CHINA said that the report of the Agile Member States Task Group and the Secretariat’s implementation plan on reform were mutually reinforcing and could not be separated. The Secretariat should develop a timetable for the implementation plan, report regularly to Member States on progress in an open and transparent manner and help Member States to implement the Task Group’s recommendations. Funding imbalances at the three levels of the Organization must be addressed and efforts made to align WHO’s priorities with those of Member States in terms of health systems strengthening. New mechanisms and institutions should be based on consensus and should not generate an additional financial burden for Member States.

She welcomed the report of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee and its contribution to improving transparency and performance. She trusted that the Advisory Committee would intensify its consultations with the Secretariat and develop the process for handling allegations against the Executive Head of the Organization and the Director of the Office of Internal Oversight

Services, drawing on existing practices in other United Nations forums. WHO's links with non-State actors should continue to be based on the Framework of Engagement with Non-State Actors. Geographical representation among WHO staff should be improved. Lastly, she hoped that the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee would have a role in supporting the implementation of reforms.

The representative of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA said that strengthening and reforming WHO constituted a key priority for her Government. The draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 reflected a significant effort to address Member States' recommendations, and she looked forward to continuing the constructive discussions on that matter. Her Government hoped to be in a position to support the proposed increase in assessed contributions at the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly and looked forward to working with the Secretariat and Member States to that end.

While work remained to be done on the issue of reform, her Government appreciated the Secretariat's commitment to improving transparency, oversight and accountability to Member States. She hoped that the Board would endorse the Secretariat's implementation plan and adopt the recommendations of the Agile Member States Task Group. Her Government looked forward to the finalization by the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee of a process for handling potential allegations against the Executive Head of the Organization and the development of a process for handling potential allegations against the Director of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. She welcomed the proposal by the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee that the Secretariat should undertake a holistic review of the Office of Internal Oversight Services and facilitate any action required by the governing bodies to formally adopt the amendments to the International Civil Service Commission statute and implement them as soon as possible. WHO should continue reforming its systems, structures and culture to ensure that its zero-tolerance policy on sexual misconduct became a reality.

The representative of TIMOR-LESTE acknowledged the progress made in improving the allocation of resources, particularly at the country level. Lessons should continue to be learned in that regard. However, the persistent uneven financing among major offices and underfinancing of the base segment remained a concern. It was also troubling that the budget allocation for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme still needed to be prioritized. Continuation of the platform for lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and increased financing for preparedness, prevention and response would ensure better preparedness for a future pandemic. Greater accountability and transparency regarding budget utilization would optimize resources at the country level, ensure the implementation of strategic programmes and support core deliverables. In the South-East Asia Region, the consultative and participatory prioritization process had enabled Member States to ensure that programmes addressed needs and emerging challenges at the country level.

The representative of INDIA said that the extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 to 2025 would scale up the implementation of public health priorities and ensure sustainable financing, accountability for results, better monitoring and coordination, and alignment with the "five Ps". Although progress had been made with respect to the target of one billion more people enjoying better health and well-being, it was important to address the indicators in which progress was worsening and inequities were widening. In order to achieve universal health coverage, there was a need for a radical reorientation of the health system towards primary health care with a focus not only on treatment but also on well-being and screening for noncommunicable diseases. WHO should promote health-seeking behaviours, taking into account socioeconomic factors, and identify high-impact interventions to improve health service delivery in accordance with country contexts and in consultation with Member States. There was also a need to work towards implementation of the global strategy on digital health 2020–2025. WHO should focus on connecting and coordinating its efforts and

interventions to build resilient health systems to prevent, prepare and respond to future health emergencies.

The representative of MOROCCO welcomed concerted efforts to make WHO an agile and high-performing organization capable of delivering greater country-level impact. The approach to the development of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 should focus on transparency and traceability and be based on credible data and indicators of relevance to the triple billion targets. It should also be aimed at strengthening implementation of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025 and delivering a measurable impact in all countries. His Government supported the recommendations of the Agile Member States Task Group and the Secretariat’s implementation plan on reform. Effective communication between the Secretariat and Member States was needed to monitor implementation of those actions and recommendations in order to ensure that WHO was agile, quick to respond and committed to implementing plans approved by Member States.

The representative of SLOVAKIA recalled that, during the meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee, agreement had been reached on organizing intersessional consultations to give Member States further opportunity to consider relevant changes, insights and recommendations, including those put forward by the Agile Member States Task Group and the Board. He urged Member States to use such platforms to improve working methods and allow for a more agile consultative process at the governing bodies level.

The representative of MOZAMBIQUE¹ said that the discussions at the meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee had helped countries to better understand the availability and allocation of resources and the funding gap at the global, regional and country levels. The considerable improvement in overall funding, particularly for core programmes, was welcome. The proposal to increase resource allocation to country offices would accelerate implementation of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025 and the achievement of the triple billion targets. The continuous mobilization of funding, notably flexible funding, to enable country offices to respond to Member States’ needs and strengthen primary health care was appreciated.

The representative of BANGLADESH¹ expressed support for the extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2023 to 2025, with a focus on country-level priorities and attainment of the triple billion targets. Initiatives on public health care and universal health coverage should be extended to address gaps in countries’ core capacities. In addition, a flexible and predictable mechanism for repurposing donor funds should be developed to enable WHO to respond to needs at the country level. He hoped that the initiatives undertaken in the context of the pandemic would facilitate better preparedness for future health emergencies.

The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL (Business Operations), thanking speakers for their comments, said that the Secretariat would provide detailed responses under the relevant agenda items. He also thanked the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee and its Chair for the open and constructive dialogue and strategic guidance for the Secretariat, which helped to advance WHO’s agenda.

The Board noted the report.

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

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

2. BUDGET AND FINANCE MATTERS: Item 20 of the agenda

Financing and implementation of the Programme budget 2022–2023 and outlook on financing of the Programme budget 2024–2025: Item 20.1 of the agenda (document EB152/26)

Proposed programme budget 2024–2025: Item 20.2 of the agenda (document EB152/27)

The CHAIR drew attention to the reports contained in documents EB152/26 and EB152/27 and to the guidance and recommendations of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board set out in paragraphs 12–24 of document EB152/4.

The representative of PARAGUAY said that the information provided in document EB152/26 was much more detailed than in previous such reports, thereby facilitating decision-making. Although there was a slight increase in core voluntary contributions for the biennium 2024–2025 compared with the biennium 2022–2023, specified voluntary contributions continued to make up the majority of financing for the base budget segment despite repeated calls for more flexible funding. He also expressed concern that, despite their importance, strategic priorities 1 and 3 were not financed from flexible funding, which should be distributed in a more efficient and balanced manner.

The Region of the Americas remained the most underfunded, receiving on average 30% of the Programme budget financing for 2022–2023, which represented around half of the amount allocated to the other regions. The Secretariat should identify the main reasons for that situation and review the mechanisms required to resolve them, particularly as WHO headquarters received surplus funding for some strategic priorities. Noting that WHO's largest expenditure component by far was related to staff costs, he called for an analysis to be undertaken to determine whether such expenditure was necessary, sustainable and appropriate to enable the Organization to achieve its objectives.

The representative of DENMARK, speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, said that the candidate countries Türkiye, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the potential candidate country Georgia, as well as Armenia, aligned themselves with his statement. He welcomed the increased transparency in the preparation of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 and its more streamlined nature, strong country focus and three main overarching objectives. The Secretariat should, however, include a description of the outcomes to be delivered, which was essential for results-based budgeting and for Member States to monitor implementation.

The Secretariat's efforts to implement the recommendations of the Working Group on Sustainable Financing were welcome, including with regard to the preparation of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025, taking into account the proposed increase in assessed contributions. He supported the continued consideration of a possible replenishment mechanism and welcomed the proposed revised approach to the allocation of flexible funding. Such measures would be important tools in addressing persisting "pockets of poverty".

The representative of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA said that, although it was pleasing that WHO had received robust support in relation to financing for the current budget cycle, the base budget continued to be unevenly financed across regions and programmes, leaving "pockets of poverty" and important work underfunded. She thanked the Secretariat for its work on the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 and on the impressive new programme budget web portal, as well as for its willingness to make further improvements based on guidance from the Programme, Budget and

Administration Committee and through intersessional consultations. Ensuring the availability of the final version of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 well in advance of its consideration at the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly would be key to enable Member States to agree on the very important budget proposal. Efforts to prioritize areas of the base budget for flexible funding and to direct more resources to the country office level were welcome, as was the incorporation in the base budget of funding for the prevention of and response to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment. Continued progress on reform was essential to secure support for any increase in assessed contributions.

The representative of YEMEN said that, although the Secretariat was to be thanked for its transparency, further details should be provided on expenditures on strategic priorities at the country and regional levels. Noting the share of the base budget segment across the three levels of the Organization and the allocations to the polio eradication and special programmes segments, he called for a larger proportion of the base budget to be allocated to country offices for programme development and capacity-building. Clear plans should be established to help countries to move from implementing relief measures to development interventions and to ensure sustainable funding for the health sector.

The representative of the UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND welcomed the increased transparency and improvements to the budget process and the Secretariat's commitment to enhancing that process further in line with the recommendations of the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Programmatic, Financial and Budgetary Governance and the Secretariat's implementation plan on reform. Much of the work to date built on the landmark decision WHA75(8) (2022) on sustainable financing, in which the Health Assembly had decided to adopt the recommendations of the Working Group on Sustainable Financing, including the implementation of the first in a series of increases in assessed contributions. Many of the challenges facing WHO, including "pockets of poverty" and imbalances across priorities and geographical areas, were linked to the way in which WHO was funded, which must be rectified. She welcomed the shift towards a greater focus on the country level and requested further information on outcomes in order to gain an understanding of how the budget was delivering results.

The representative of FRANCE said that the lack of alignment between the base budget segment and available funding was regrettable and a way should be found to ensure that priorities were aligned with available funding. Base programmes should be financed in a flexible manner and should not have to depend on voluntary contributions. His Government had actively supported an increase in assessed contributions to improve WHO's sustainable financing, which should be accompanied by a limited increase in the budget and improved financial management. He welcomed the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025, in particular the stability of the budget envelope, and supported the work of the Agile Member States Task Group and the initial actions taken by WHO to improve accountability.

The representative of the REPUBLIC OF KOREA said that the new features and presentation format made the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 easier for Member States to understand. He highlighted the importance of the bottom-up country prioritization process which, together with the strategic allocation of flexible funding and the increase in the share of the total budget allocated to country offices, constituted significant changes. A transparent and detailed explanation of the budget adjustment process among the strategic priorities at the regional and global levels would promote Member State engagement. The proposed 20% increase in assessed contributions would help to improve equity in resource allocation over the long term and mitigate the challenges related to persisting "pockets of poverty". Given the significant increase in the share of funding allocated to countries, information on achievements and progress should be provided on an ongoing basis, including through the digital platform, which should be further developed on the basis of feedback from Member States.

The representative of the RUSSIAN FEDERATION trusted that the comments and proposals made by Member States would be duly reflected in the new version of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025. The Secretariat had used language and approaches not agreed by WHO and the United Nations, and the reference to a focus on sexual and gender minorities in paragraph 35 of document EB152/27 should be deleted. Furthermore, paragraphs 42–44 referred to the Director-General’s 10 proposals on strengthening the global architecture for health emergency preparedness, response and resilience, even though no decision had been taken by Member States in that regard, and the Secretariat’s intention to present that initiative as part of WHO’s programmatic activities was not consistent with Member States’ expectations.

While the Secretariat’s efforts to improve the quality of the information provided were appreciated, Member States would require comprehensive information on projected expenditures in terms of key budget items, staff costs, inflation indicators and currency fluctuations. The Programme, Budget and Administration Committee had already recommended the inclusion of most of that information. Information should also be provided on the key outcome and output indicators to which the Secretariat intended to direct additional funds from the proposed increase in assessed contributions. It was also hoped that the Secretariat would provide a detailed breakdown of projected costs during the forthcoming operational planning process. If Member States decided to increase assessed contributions, the Secretariat should prepare a performance review on the first round of increases and a detailed breakdown of how the funds were spent. The risk-based approach was welcome and should be further strengthened by the Secretariat, including by submitting a statement on acceptable risk parameters for Member States’ consideration.

The representative of MALAYSIA noted with satisfaction the relatively acceptable overall level of financing and utilization of the Programme budget 2022–2023. The revised amount for the base segment had helped the Member States of the Western Pacific Region to improve access to quality essential health services, medicines, vaccines and diagnostics, better prepare for health emergencies and safeguard healthy environments. The comprehensive and transparent financial reporting structure enhanced WHO’s integrity and credibility. While the projections for the financing of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 might still evolve, it was hoped that with the proposed 20% increase in assessed contributions and other sources of flexible funding, there would be sufficient funding across all areas, in particular those that were underfunded.

The representative of CANADA welcomed the Member State consultations and prioritization exercises that would assist in the immensely challenging task of planning WHO’s work in the biennium 2024–2025. The important lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic would also help to refocus efforts in the next biennium. Expressing support for the “five Ps”, he underlined the need to address the root causes and drivers of health inequity in order to achieve the triple billion targets and the Sustainable Development Goals. Accordingly, WHO should continue to invest in strategic priority 3, while due recognition of its importance by Member States would help to generate momentum for that often under-resourced work. The Secretariat’s plans to support Member States in adapting technical products to local contexts and evaluating their uptake were welcome. He urged the Secretariat to continue to strengthen its capacity to develop, disseminate and support the implementation of impact-oriented guidance. The integration of gender, equity and rights throughout WHO’s programming, including the Health Emergencies Programme, and the resources dedicated to that work were welcome. Expanded internal oversight and better monitoring of the return on investment in enabling functions were required to ensure a strong, well-functioning WHO that was able to address risks and take proactive action.

The representative of BRAZIL reiterated the urgent need for WHO to address chronic imbalances in the regional distribution of resources and trusted that the decisions on the budget to be taken at the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly would help to resolve that issue. While noting the specific circumstances associated with voluntary contributions to PAHO, he called for further immediate action

to tackle persistent gaps in funding in the Region of the Americas. The Secretariat's efforts to maintain the current level of the base segment were to be commended, and the innovative procedures adopted, including the provision of information on prioritization, were appreciated. However, additional details on current expenditures and on the use of a possible increase in assessed contributions should be provided. WHO should follow the common practice of other organizations of the United Nations system concerning the complete disclosure of information on expenditures.

With regard to the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025, the proposals on strengthening the global architecture for health emergency preparedness, response and resilience were still under consideration, which should be reflected in document EB152/27, and the Secretariat should provide information on the associated costs. In his Government's view, no further action should be taken on those proposals, which had served their purpose. Under strategic priority 1, priority must be given to promoting access to medicines and local production. Under strategic priority 3, there should be alignment with the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health and WHO should refrain from using terms not discussed by Member States, such as commercial determinants of health.

The representative of ETHIOPIA, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, thanked the Secretariat for its extensive efforts regarding the preparation of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 with the aim of getting WHO back on track to achieve the triple billion targets while providing continuity and stability for the final phase of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025. The launch of the Global Health Emergency Appeal and the proposed new approach to the allocation of flexible resources towards high-priority outputs were welcome. The Member States of the African Region welcomed the prioritization process and efforts to distribute resources to country offices. The proposed 50% allocation of the base segment to country offices should be further increased to cover the human and financial resources required to adequately address health needs. Although there was a compelling need to improve the determinants of health, strategic priority 3 remained a "pocket of poverty" for the African Region. The Secretariat should evaluate the effectiveness of the current mechanism to ensure a more even distribution of funding.

The Board should consider innovative ways of increasing the budget allocation to countries and regions, with the aim of achieving at least a 75% share over an agreed phased timeline for 2024–2027. The proposed increase in assessed contributions for the biennium 2024–2025 should be distributed to countries first and more effective mechanisms adopted during the current biennium to address the uneven financing across outcomes and major offices. As at September 2022, the funding gap for the African Region accounted for around 60% of WHO's total funding gap. She urged stakeholders to provide flexible funding that would create impact in countries. The Member States of the African Region had defined key outcomes and inputs for which WHO's support was expected in 2024–2025 and the Secretariat should respect the results of the bottom-up, evidence-based planning, budgeting and resource mobilization allocation. The draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 should be revised to ensure that it was an instrument for achieving the triple billion targets, creating impact in countries and ensuring health for all.

The representative of INDIA said that the evaluation of budget allocations among different programmes was critical to ensure better prioritization of available funds. Increased clarity on agendas would also help to drive plans for the next biennium and facilitate an understanding of expected outcomes and milestones. Using "heatmaps" across two bienniums to compare outcomes under strategic priorities might not be sufficient, as outcomes would have to be clearly measurable and could change over time, and data might not be fully comparable. Detailed and meaningful consultations with Member States on strategic priorities and activities was critical, and the budgeting process should be better linked to governance processes and regional and country priorities. A collaborative mechanism should be developed so that projects and activities were decided in consultation with Member States to ensure value for money and alignment with country priorities. The digital platform would promote transparency, and regular programme and expenditure reviews would facilitate programme

implementation and enhance oversight. The budget should be equitably allocated across all strategic priorities at the global, regional and national levels. Priorities and deliverables should be tailored to the country context and defined at the micro level. Lastly, detailed principles, thresholds and guidelines should be developed on the earmarking of voluntary contributions, while quarterly review meetings at the global, regional and national levels would enhance coordination.

The representative of COLOMBIA welcomed the recommendation of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee to continue the consultative process on the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 during the intersessional period. He was pleased to note that the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 did not foresee any increase, despite the current economic conditions. Such improvements in efficiencies were in keeping with the recommendations of the Agile Member States Task Group and would lead to greater transparency, accountability and implementation.

A strengthened Organization required more resources, in particular flexible, unearmarked funding that could be directed to public health priorities at all levels. At the same time, however, the critical financial situation that most countries were currently facing should be taken into account. For example, his Government had financial commitments not only to WHO but also to PAHO. WHO should take into account the recommendations of the Agile Member States Task Group and the Secretariat's implementation plan on reform. If the Organization was to achieve its priorities, the funding gap had to be filled. Greater equity both for regional and country offices and among strategic priorities was also essential, and innovative mechanisms, such as a replenishment mechanism, should continue to be discussed.

The representative of PERU said that the detailed information provided on the implementation of the Programme budget 2022–2023 was a significant improvement compared with previous years. He expressed concern that strategic priorities 1 and 3 were not financed from flexible funding, which should be distributed in a more equitable and efficient manner. The Region of the Americas continued to receive the least funding, and action should be taken to close the gap between the programme budget and actual funding. The budget should be used to make tangible improvements within the Organization and other unearmarked funding sources should be used to address WHO's priorities. It was important to develop a formula to address the particular situation faced by the Member States of the Region of the Americas, who contributed financially to PAHO as well as to WHO.

The representative of DENMARK noted with satisfaction that the Secretariat had responded to the need for a participatory and transparent process in the development of the programme budget and welcomed the document's improved format. Although an increased focus in the programme budget on building country capacities was important for achieving the triple billion targets and the Sustainable Development Goals, there should also be a strong emphasis on developing the essential normative functions of WHO and maintaining a robust leadership at WHO headquarters and regional levels. The principle of leaving no one behind should remain at the core of the programme budget, with attention given to the most marginalized and vulnerable populations, including sexual minorities. He welcomed the strong commitment to reforming the culture of WHO, strengthening accountability and preventing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment, for which adequate funding must be ensured. His Government fully supported the proposed 20% increase in assessed contributions, which would be an important step towards achieving a sustainably financed WHO.

The representative of OMAN, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, said that the identification of country priorities had been a key element in the preparation of the draft Proposed programme budget, 2024–2025. The consultation process with Member States and consideration of elements such as national health and country cooperation strategies and the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for each country would enable support to be targeted where it was most needed and significantly strengthen country capacity.

The Secretariat should identify key measurable and time-bound results, propose supporting actions and make the necessary investments at the country level to implement the agreed priorities. Given that the prioritization exercise had been undertaken almost two years before the start of the biennium 2024–2025, there should be a clear process for reviewing country priorities as situations evolved, and the Secretariat should remain flexible to accommodate potential changes in priorities, for example due to health emergencies. He urged Member States to support the proposed increase in assessed contributions in order to strengthen the role of WHO as the leading health agency and drive positive impact in countries.

The representative of SLOVAKIA said that her Government was in favour of increasing the funding allocated to noncommunicable diseases. WHO required more assessed contributions and flexible funding and the resources should be used for implementation and delivery at the country level.

The representative of NORWAY¹ said that decision WHA75(8) (2022) and Member States' commitment to ensuring a sustainably financed WHO was an important step towards a democratically funded, more efficient and effective Organization. The draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 was historical as it included the first tranche of the proposed increase in assessed contributions. The revised format, new programme budget web portal and “five Ps” were welcome. The increased country focus, which her Government supported, depended on strong normative and leadership functions at WHO headquarters; those core and enabling functions must be adequately funded. The connection between programmatic priorities and financing must be improved, including by providing more flexible and predictable funding and taking significant steps towards greater efficiency, transparency and accountability. As of the year 2023, more than one third of her Government's voluntary contributions would be fully flexible and she encouraged other Member States to increase the flexibility of their funding.

The representative of JAMAICA¹ expressed support for measures to strengthen WHO's viability, noting the Organization's essential role in global health governance and its core functions of establishing and enforcing international norms and standards and coordinating global efforts to achieve health goals. Assessed contributions should constitute the main source of funding for the Organization to reduce any influence associated with voluntary contributions. WHO's reform initiative should incorporate PAHO's valuable experience in bottom-up prioritization. It was important to examine the budgeting process, including the percentage spent on administrative costs compared with the costs of the services delivered. WHO should focus on its core mandate, thereby reducing duplication with the efforts of other United Nations and international organizations.

The representative of ECUADOR¹ welcomed WHO's efforts to carry out its valuable work despite limited resources and the need for reform. The Organization's efforts to secure sufficient funding for programmes and ensure the continued provision of normative and technical support were highly appreciated. With regard to the Programme budget 2022–2023, he supported the recommendation of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee that the Secretariat should continue to improve the uneven financing across programmes and major offices, and noted that the Region of the Americas continued to receive the lowest amount of funding. He expressed support for the continuation of the consultative process on the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 during the intersessional period, as well as the proposed prioritization. With regard to the proposed increase in assessed contributions, the Secretariat should bear in mind the efforts that Member States were making against a

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

background of fiscal austerity, and use the resources provided by Member States as efficiently as possible.

The representative of THAILAND¹ said that the proportion of the base programme financed from voluntary contributions should be increased in order to close the funding gap. Highlighting the important convening power of WHO, he said that more efficient health expenditure would enable health programmes to be funded at the country level. To support better budget allocation for the next programme budget, WHO should review the expenditure, outcomes and performance for the previous biennium and assess country priorities to ensure that needs were being met. His Government supported the “five Ps”, effective budget allocation and priority health achievements.

The representative of POLAND¹ thanked the Secretariat for its efforts and commitment to improving the transparency and structure of the programme budget and related documents and was pleased to note its involvement in the preparation and implementation of the reform package developed by the Agile Member States Task Group. It was, however, regrettable that not all ideas and options had been properly considered during the discussions on WHO budgetary reforms. The main problem lay in the expectations of Member States and the way in which they entrusted tasks to WHO without taking into account its capacities. Although she understood the need for and benefits of increasing WHO’s funding, in particular to improve its flexibility, now was not a good time to enter into new long-term commitments, such as an increase in assessed contributions, given the various ongoing crises that placed a heavy burden on the national budget.

The representative of GERMANY¹ noted with concern that the Programme budget 2022–2023 showed a major funding gap and underlined the need for sustainable and predictable financing. He therefore welcomed the recommendations of the Working Group on Sustainable Financing, in particular on a gradual increase in assessed contributions and consideration of a possible replenishment mechanism, and supported the historic draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025. The Secretariat should be commended for its extensive efforts over the previous decade to improve transparency and accountability in cooperation with Member States, which had made WHO one of the best-positioned organizations of the United Nations system in terms of financial transparency.

The representative of SINGAPORE¹ said that while his Government was supportive of the proposed increase in assessed contributions, resources remained limited and should be used effectively and efficiently. WHO’s work to better support countries in implementing national action plans to improve their health systems and address critical gaps was welcome, but continued investment in normative functions and global public health goods was important and would maximize the limited resources available. Areas for such investment included evidence-based technical packages for tobacco control and other noncommunicable disease risk factors, and surveillance systems for infectious diseases.

The representative of AUSTRALIA¹ said that the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 played an important role in setting the strategy for the extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025 and in further strengthening WHO’s accountability and transparency. He welcomed the Secretariat’s commitment to: strengthen capacities and resource allocation at the country level; maintain a focus on improved accountability, compliance and risk management functions; reinforce a culture of zero tolerance for sexual misconduct across the Organization; and revise the structure of the budget to enhance strategic oversight. The Secretariat’s efforts to bring prioritization to the fore of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025, including by providing information on

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

how it was linked to resource allocation, and to enhance Member States' participation in and understanding of the budget planning process were appreciated. The digital platform afforded flexibility and could be enhanced in the future.

Sustainable financing was important to enable WHO to finance its priority activities in a flexible and predictable manner. The consensus reached at the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly, including the commitment that WHO's base budget should be fully flexibly funded, must be respected. His Government, which had recently renewed its strategic partnership with WHO, would continue to provide flexibility through its core voluntary contributions over the next five years and encouraged all donors to increase the flexibility of their funding. Lastly, he requested further details on how the Secretariat was aligning efforts to fund the activities prioritized by Member States and those it had deemed critical for achieving the triple billion targets by 2025.

The representative of the NETHERLANDS¹ commended the Secretariat for its efforts to provide greater clarity in the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025. Under the new approach for results-based planning agreed at the start of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025, traditional activity planning would be counterproductive. However, some Member States had expressed concern over the transparency of the implementation of funding. Rather than requesting a level of detail that was too granular, she hoped that it would be possible to obtain the level of transparency needed to hold the Secretariat accountable without engaging in micromanagement. The new programme budget web portal was an innovative way of providing additional insights and she looked forward to discussing it further at the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly. Emphasizing the importance of the proposed increase in assessed contributions, she urged Member States and donors to increase their flexible voluntary funding to enable WHO to deliver transparently on all aspects of its important mandate.

The representative of NAMIBIA¹ commended the Secretariat for the development of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025, which took into consideration the revised Programme budget 2022–2023, was focused on country needs and included a greater emphasis on achieving the triple billion targets. WHO headquarters remained the best financed of all major offices, while the Region of the Americas and the African Region continued to receive a low level of financing with several “pockets of poverty”. It was greatly concerning that the African Region received the lowest amount of funding for all outcomes under strategic priority 3. The Secretariat should work towards increasing the share of the programme budget allocated to countries and regions according to an agreed phased timeline for 2024–2027 with the aim of reaching a budget allocation of at least 75%. It should also distribute the proposed increase in assessed contributions to countries first in order to bridge the funding and expertise gap.

The representative of SUDAN¹ expressed appreciation for efforts to support programme budget implementation. The programme budget should be results based, and accountability, transparency, responsibility and risk management should be strengthened. Funding must be flexible and allocated to countries and regions depending on their priorities and needs. He hoped that the Secretariat would be able to increase the funding allocated to countries like Sudan that hosted thousands of refugees, migrants and displaced persons. The Sustainable Development Goals were far from being achieved, and technical support from the Secretariat was required to strengthen health systems and better address challenges exacerbated by global warming and poverty.

The representative of SOUTH AFRICA,¹ noting that the large majority of the base budget segment was financed from specified voluntary contributions, said that the funding gap was a concern and underscored the urgent need for more sustainable financing. Although the revised Programme

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

budget 2022–2023 had ensured additional funding for all approved outcomes and strategic priorities, some areas remained underfunded, including strategic priority 3, which was important for Africa, and funding must be allocated to countries as well as to WHO headquarters. She hoped that implementation of the proposed 20% increase in assessed contributions would be a key driver in improving the projected financing of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025. It would also help to meet the needs of countries and regions, in particular the Region of the Americas and the African Region, which faced funding shortfalls. Lastly, she requested donors to provide more flexible funding to WHO.

The representative of BANGLADESH,¹ noting the progress made in strengthening WHO, said that efforts to reform the Organization, notably in the areas of governance and financing, must continue. Although the proposed increase in assessed contributions was in line with the core programme budget, the more predictable funding should take into account countries' diverse needs and priorities in order to achieve health equity. The focus on increasing WHO's efficiency and transparency in programme implementation should also be maintained. Member States and donors should follow Norway's example in making its voluntary contributions flexible, which would help to increase WHO's independence. He called for balanced geographical representation among WHO staff.

The representative of URUGUAY¹ welcomed the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 and digital platform, which should be considered in further detail. A balance between assessed and voluntary contributions would increase predictability and facilitate planning, and donors should increase the flexibility of their contributions. There was an urgent need to revise the budget allocation to the Region of the Americas. She supported the linkage between the proposed increase in assessed contributions and improvements in WHO's transparency and efficiency, as well as the recommendation to continue the consultative process on the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 during the intersessional period.

The representative of MOZAMBIQUE¹ welcomed the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025, which would increase the funding allocated to country offices and bolster Member States' involvement in building an enabling environment to improve coordination and trust. Ensuring that the final programme budget allocation reflected country priorities would help to strengthen primary health care and achieve universal health coverage. The draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 would also accelerate progress towards the achievement of the triple billion targets and improve quality of care, in particular for noncommunicable diseases. The overall allocations to polio eradication and emergency operations and appeals were also appreciated.

The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR-GENERAL (Business Operations) thanked speakers for their valuable input and encouragement. On the issue of country strengthening, countries were at the centre of everything WHO did. At the same time, however, it was equally important to protect WHO's normative function. The share of the base segment allocated to the country level had increased from 39% in the biennium 2018–2019 to 50% in the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025, which was 4% higher than in the biennium 2022–2023. A gradual approach should, however, be taken so as not to disrupt a number of organizational processes, particularly the normative function at WHO headquarters. Lessons had been learned on prioritization, and the bottom-up prioritization exercise had been improved. Sustainable financing was critical to ensure that Member States, partners and the Secretariat could collectively deliver on priorities. Improvements had also been made to equity in resource allocation, but much work remained to be done.

WHO's staffing component varied according to the type of work performed. Much of the upstream work was undertaken at WHO headquarters and in the European Region, resulting in higher

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staff costs. A great deal of WHO's operational work was performed in the African and Eastern Mediterranean Regions and the percentage of staff costs was therefore lower. Since 2018, the base budget had grown by 35%, whereas staff costs had increased by 25% despite the COVID-19-related work that WHO was required to perform. With regard to WHO's value for money and utility, he noted that the investment case for a sustainably financed WHO had estimated that every US\$ 1 invested in WHO generated a US\$ 35 return. The pandemic had also served to highlight the centrality of health and bring WHO to the fore.

The draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 had been the subject of more consultations than any previous programme budget and took into account many, if not all, of the comments from Member States. As part of the reform process, the Secretariat was engaging with Member States and reflecting their priorities in the programme budget. Responding to comments by the representative of the Netherlands, he said that the Secretariat had also expressed the intention not to revert to activity-level budgeting. The reason why WHO was so far ahead of other entities in terms of results-based management and budgeting was because Member States had pushed it to that point through various reform activities and it would be counterproductive to go backwards. Greater clarity could be provided during the operational planning exercise in November 2023 when Member States could be provided with the details they sought. He apologized that the digital platform had been made available slightly later than anticipated and invited Member States to provide their feedback on it by the cut-off date of 10 February 2023.

The DIRECTOR-GENERAL said that the future of global health would depend on strong country offices working closely with Member States to address their priorities, which required a comprehensive approach. A group of WHO representatives was currently drafting a plan of action to reinforce country offices that would include medium- and long-term interventions as well as a 100-day challenge. One important proposal under consideration was to make the heads of country offices leaders and give them the delegation of authority needed for recruitment, procurement and decision-making. Resource allocation was key to that process, and an increase in assessed contributions and a replenishment mechanism would give WHO the flexibility to direct money where it was most needed, namely at the country level. Even with the current high levels of specified voluntary contributions, WHO was fully committed to doing everything possible to ensure that country offices would receive the majority of resources. It was time to seize the opportunity and commit to change in order to strengthen country offices and achieve better results, and he welcomed the support expressed by the Board in that regard.

Efforts to strengthen WHO should reinforce the core business and main responsibility of the Organization, namely developing norms and standards. Country offices could use their experience on the front line to influence norms, standards and guidance. Strong country offices could also promote better alignment of the three levels of the Organization, with WHO headquarters providing support to deliver results at the country level.

With regard to concerns expressed about regional budget allocation, he said that the current allocation was fair on the basis of the criteria used. Member States from all regions should exercise their oversight function and review the criteria used; such a process would increase transparency. The Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee and the Agile Member States Task Group could also be requested to undertake a review. WHO would be pleased to make any improvements to ensure that the formula used for the distribution of resources was the right one and that the budget share allocation was correct.

He thanked Member States for their support, recommendations and comments. Work had already begun on the implementation of various recommendations and progress would be made on the plan of action being developed by WHO representatives once the cost implications and other details had been finalized. A dashboard would also be made available so that Member States could monitor the progress being made.

The Board noted the reports.

Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025: Item 20.3 of the agenda (document EB152/28)

Scale of assessments for 2024–2025: Item 20.4 of the agenda (document EB152/29)

Amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules: Item 20.5 of the agenda (documents EB152/30 and EB152/30 Add.1)

The CHAIR drew attention to the reports contained in documents EB152/28, EB152/29 and EB152/30. She invited the Board to consider the draft resolution on the scale of assessments for 2024–2025, contained in document EB152/29, and the draft resolution on amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules, contained in document EB152/30, the financial and administrative implications of which were contained in document EB152/30 Add.1. She also drew attention to the recommendations and guidance of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board set out in paragraphs 25–28, 43 and 86–91 of document EB152/4.

The representative of DENMARK, speaking on behalf of the European Union and its Member States, said that the candidate countries North Macedonia, Montenegro, Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina aligned themselves with his statement. Although the European Union and its Member States supported in principle the “five Ps”, the carefully negotiated Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025, must be fully implemented. However, he understood that full implementation was not possible because of financial or time constraints and might even hinder the achievement of the triple billion targets. He welcomed the proposal to improve universal health coverage indicators to track progress towards the triple billion targets.

The true impact of the adoption of the “five Ps” and consequent shift in focus on other outcome goals of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025 should be clarified before the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly. Member States, which were considering the “five Ps” for the first time at the global level, should have further opportunity to discuss them, including with the Secretariat, as part of the consultations requested in resolution WHA75.6 (2022). Accordingly, the Board should take note of the report contained in document EB152/28 and further intersessional consultations should be held.

The representative of MADAGASCAR, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, welcomed the actions taken to strengthen country capacity and to accelerate progress towards the achievement of the triple billion targets and health-related Sustainable Development Goals and noted the alignment of the “five Ps” and the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 with those objectives. The low level of universal health coverage, particularly in African countries, was a concern, and the focus on primary health care was highly appreciated.

During the extended Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025, the Secretariat should intensify its support to countries to rapidly scale up implementation of their public health priorities, establish sustainable financing and accountability for results, and undertake monitoring and coordination. The Member States of the African Region were committed to the consultation process. He called on all Member States to strengthen their collaboration, taking into account the specific needs of each country. Regional and country offices must receive a significantly larger share of the draft Proposed programme budget 2024–2025 compared with the previous biennium in order to deliver measurable impact. The dashboard would make it easier to monitor implementation. With regard to the amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules, the Member States of the African Region considered that Article 7 of the WHO Constitution should be applied in a rational manner and that discussions should be held with the Member States concerned before any decision was taken to suspend the right to vote. He noted that the same scale of assessments used for the previous biennium had been applied for the biennium 2024–2025, but with a 20% increase.

The representative of BRAZIL said that there was an urgent need to intensify efforts to put the international community back on track to reach the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He applauded the intention to redouble those efforts in the light of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Universal health coverage was essential to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and should therefore remain the guiding principle of WHO's strategy until 2030. Accordingly, the strengthening of primary health care and provision of more efficient and affordable services should be the cornerstone of WHO's general programme of work. The consultations on the outcomes of the extended Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025, and the focus on countries' priorities and needs were welcome. He appreciated the changes made, in particular those that fostered closer alignment with WHO's mandate and Member States' collective vision and avoided language that promoted the securitization of health or were inconsistent with the Rio Political Declaration on Social Determinants of Health.

Turning to the amendments to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules, he said that his Government had a strong preference for option A to amend Regulation 6.5, as set out in document EB152/30. The current methodology for the application of Article 7 of the WHO Constitution had been determined by resolutions of the Health Assembly; any changes to the usual, traditional and well-functioning practice, if enacted through consensus, should also be made only by means of a Health Assembly resolution.

The representative of MALAYSIA thanked the Secretariat for facilitating discussions on the extension of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025. Work over the next two years should be guided by national priorities and the “five Ps” which he hoped would further build Member States' capacities in providing, promoting and protecting health, empower health care systems, build partnerships and strengthen health equity. Through the WHO results framework, it would be possible to track progress, identify shortfalls and improve indicators towards achieving the triple billion targets. Noting the diversified priorities across the three levels of WHO, his Government was committed to prioritizing and focusing on measurable impacts to improve health through multisectoral engagement and make progress towards achieving the triple billion targets and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The representative of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA said that WHO had outlined a reasonable path forward for the extension period of the Thirteenth General Programme of Work, 2019–2025. While the “five Ps” would provide a new framework, the focus should remain on the achievement of the triple billion targets and the Sustainable Development Goals. She welcomed WHO's proposal to tailor its work to the diverse needs and priorities of different countries and regions in a strategic and evidenced-based manner, and highlighted the importance of strengthening health and information systems, including data collection, and the health workforce. Efforts must be balanced across the triple billion targets in order to reclaim critical global health gains lost during the COVID-19 pandemic, and between the objectives of ensuring health security and equity. She expressed appreciation for WHO's work to advance health and rights for all people, particularly historically marginalized populations including women and girls, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex communities.

The representative of CANADA said that regular review of WHO's Financial Regulations and Financial Rules was important to ensure that they remained fit for purpose. He thanked the Secretariat for the comprehensive package of amendments put forward. Any future proposed amendments should be made available earlier in the intersessional period to allow for closer engagement between Member States and the Secretariat. He looked forward to working closely with the Secretariat on future updates to the Financial Regulations and Financial Rules.

The meeting rose at 13:00.

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