

**PROVISIONAL SUMMARY RECORD OF THE FOURTH MEETING**

**WHO headquarters, Geneva**  
**Tuesday, 23 January 2024, scheduled at 14:30**

**Chair: Dr H.M. AL KUWARI (Qatar)**  
**later: Dr E.A.A. DOS REIS AMARAL (Timor-Leste)**  
**later: Dr H.M. AL KUWARI (Qatar)**

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## FOURTH MEETING

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

**MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE MATTERS:** Item 25 of the agenda

**Prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment:** Item 25.1 of the agenda (document EB154/30)

The representative of CHINA, speaking in his capacity as Chair of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board, drew attention to the recommendations and guidance proposed by the Committee on the prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment set out in paragraph 57 of document EB154/4.

The representative of FRANCE, speaking on behalf of Australia, Brazil, Canada, the Republic of Korea, Colombia, Costa Rica, Chile, the United States of America, Indonesia, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Mexico, the Republic of Moldova, Norway, New Zealand, Panama, Paraguay, Malaysia, Monaco, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Switzerland and Thailand, and the Member States of the European Union, expressed deep concern regarding cases of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment during the tenth Ebola outbreak. The involvement of WHO staff in such acts damaged confidence in multilateralism; senior management must ensure procedures were in place to prevent such situations occurring in future. She welcomed the Organization's efforts to reflect on the issue and introduce transparent reform, including by transitioning from the WHO Management Response Plan to the three-year strategy on preventing and addressing sexual misconduct (2023–2025), and to enhance legal and accountability frameworks as part of a zero-tolerance approach.

The adoption of a victim- and survivor-centred approach was commendable; that must be further strengthened by improving assistance for survivors, including financial assistance, notably through clear specifications for future use of the WHO Survivor Assistance Fund. The institutionalization of prevention and response should also be prioritized. In that regard, she welcomed the development of the end-to-end sexual misconduct incident management system and its benchmark for dealing with allegations. Adequate investigative functions and human resources would be needed to ensure its success. While the steps taken by WHO to boost investigative capacity within the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services were welcome, the Secretariat should provide further information on how remaining gaps would be addressed.

The Organization should continue to focus efforts on emergency situations and ensure that all victims of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment perpetrated by WHO personnel, and all survivors of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence – especially women and girls – were provided with comprehensive assistance. To that end, WHO should continue to exchange best practices with other United Nations agencies through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. That work must be underpinned by Organization-wide cultural change led by senior leadership and facilitated by staff training and

support at all levels, with the contribution of the WHO Academy, to promote a trust-based culture within a safe and respectful workplace.

The representative of the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA said that sexual harassment represented a major occupational health hazard for health professionals worldwide, particularly for female employees. The issue should be addressed by raising awareness through regular mandatory training; redesigned work processes; and improved communication regarding rights and obligations. Action should be taken not only in the context of health emergencies, but in all health care workplaces. Her Government agreed with the implementation of Member State accountability in accordance with the WHO Accountability Framework for the Prevention of and Response to Sexual Misconduct, and called on the Secretariat to provide the necessary support and guidance.

The representative of RWANDA, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, commended the progress made in handling substantiated cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, stressing the need to conduct investigations in a fair, transparent and objective manner, while upholding the dignity of victims. However, the poor completion rate of the implementation plan for Year 1 of the three-year strategy on preventing and addressing sexual misconduct indicated that the framework, tools and policies were not yet sufficiently institutionalized. Greater collaboration with all stakeholders was needed to address the challenges hindering the effective prevention of sexual misconduct and implement the strategy. The prevention of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment should be mainstreamed into all resource mobilization efforts when responding to health emergencies. The African Region remained committed to implementing the three-year strategy and would welcome regular updates on progress.

The representative of TIMOR-LESTE commended the continued efforts to address sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment through the three-year strategy, the associated annual implementation plan and the Accountability Framework. Further work was needed to raise awareness of and implement the policies on preventing and addressing sexual misconduct and preventing and addressing retaliation to ensure that cases were reported. Her Government took a zero-tolerance approach to sexual misconduct and to retaliation against those reporting it and stressed the need for ongoing capacity-building as part of a victim-centred approach. She called for country-level support to enable implementation of standard operating procedures for referrals to safe houses, which were important to guarantee the confidentiality of victims.

The representative of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA expressed appreciation for the concerted approach to addressing sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment among WHO personnel and implementing partners, including the improvements made to the Organization's policies, structures and operations, which were essential to rebuild trust and guarantee a culture of accountability. She welcomed the open and meaningful engagement with Member States during development of the three-year strategy and the Accountability Framework, and at the inaugural stakeholder review conference for the prevention and response to sexual misconduct. She also welcomed the establishment of the Survivor Assistance Fund and urged the Secretariat to make best use of those resources, including by providing further rounds of assistance to victims or survivors of sexual exploitation and abuse during the tenth Ebola outbreak. WHO must provide all due and appropriate compensation available under the law; the Secretariat should consider implementing the recommendations on reparations made by the Independent Commission on Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo during the Response to the Tenth Ebola Outbreak. The Secretariat should share the final report of the Independent Commission with Member States and provide updates on the implementation of those recommendations. Her Government was committed to ensuring that all activities to prevent sexual misconduct were fully funded and therefore welcomed the discussions on innovative solutions to finance WHO's prevention and safeguarding work in emergencies, in particular regarding the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee's recommendation to consider prevention activities as a direct

cost within the cost recovery mechanism, and the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee's recommendation that the Secretariat should propose options for sustainably funding such activities in emergency operations. Her Government agreed that the Secretariat should pursue a comprehensive stocktaking review no later than January 2025 to assess whether the key actions and reforms contained in the three-year strategy had led to the intended results. Further progress was needed in terms of the Organization's systems and culture, with senior management leading by example.

The representative of PERU commended the progress made in preventing sexual misconduct within the Organization, especially in its country offices and through the standardized sexual misconduct risk assessment tool. It was vital to establish a zero-tolerance policy throughout the Organization, including in community-facing offices and in activities performed by implementing partners or involving Member States. Institutional policies, particularly in relation to the time taken to investigate and resolve cases, needed further work, which would require additional resources and greater automation of the reporting and investigation process. The progress achieved meant that WHO was well-placed to continue strengthening its policies in that area, as part of a victim-centred, zero-tolerance approach to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment.

The representative of TOGO commended the progress made with regard to the prevention of sexual misconduct and outlined prevention measures taken at the national level, including the introduction of a gender strategy and action plan, and capacity-building for stakeholders. Challenges remained in implementing Member State accountability in accordance with the Accountability Framework and securing resources for the prevention and response to sexual misconduct during health emergencies.

The representative of ETHIOPIA expressed support for the group statement delivered by the representative of France. He welcomed the continued commitment to changing WHO's institutional culture regarding sexual misconduct and acknowledged the efforts made by the Secretariat to assess current activities in that area at the regional and country levels. Work to complete the Organization's policy framework, notably with the introduction of the Policy on Preventing and Addressing Sexual Misconduct was also noted. His Government strongly supported work to enhance national capacities on the prevention of and response to sexual misconduct through the development of national policies, the mobilization of resources and the strengthening of health and legal systems to assist victims and survivors. The Secretariat should mobilize more resources to that end, including by seeking more flexible funding from donors, and improve the integration of prevention and response activities in emergency funds by incorporating a plan of action in all emergency responses. Member States, other United Nations agencies and humanitarian organizations must work together to address sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment in all situations, including humanitarian settings.

The representative of SLOVAKIA commended the progress made, but expressed concern regarding the sustainability of work to address sexual misconduct in the context of a rising number of conflicts and emergencies. Greater emphasis should be placed on the development of culturally and linguistically appropriate digital solutions and educational tools that would indicate how cultural needs could be met at the country level. Such tools could be used to address other forms of serious misconduct, such as discrimination, abuse of authority and corruption, as part of a holistic and systematic approach to tackling all forms of misconduct. He expressed appreciation for the Secretariat's improved communication regarding sexual misconduct and called for Member States to continue to be provided with timely, up-to-date information about initiated, ongoing and completed investigations or legal procedures linked to gender-based violence and serious misconduct.

The representative of POLAND<sup>1</sup> stressed the importance of prioritizing the rights, privacy and needs of victims and survivors of sexual misconduct, particularly during the investigation phase, and providing them with adequate support, including psychosocial support. Meaningful, context-specific community engagement was also critical to ensuring their protection. Her Government strongly supported the Organization's investment in capacity-building and training for staff; a culture of honesty, openness and responsibility was essential to empowering staff to speak up. Senior management should lead by example in that area and establish clear lines of responsibility and accountability. It was also vital to uphold the overarching principles of non-discrimination and gender equality in all WHO policies and programmes.

**The Committee noted the report.**

**Evaluation: update and proposed workplan for 2024–2025:** Item 25.2 of the agenda (document EB154/31)

The representative of CHINA, speaking in his capacity as Chair of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board, drew attention to the recommendations and guidance proposed by the Committee set out in paragraph 59 of document EB154/4.

The representative of MOROCCO, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region, said that, since the establishment of the evaluation function in September 2022, his Region had participated in Organization-wide and decentralized evaluations to promote accountability and organizational learning, and influence political and practical decision-making. Noting the emphasis on independent evaluations of WHO's country-level contribution, he thanked Djibouti, Iraq and Tunisia for introducing such evaluations and looked forward to learning of the results and recommendations. Further evaluations in the biennium 2024–2025 would strengthen accountability and boost organizational learning at WHO.

It was a cause of concern that flexible funds were the primary funding source envisioned for the planned evaluations; future evaluations should not further stretch already limited flexible resources. His Region therefore proposed that Member States establish a dedicated WHO evaluation fund to ensure the independence of the evaluation function.

The representative of JAPAN expressed support for the proposed workplan for 2024–2025 and commended the efforts of the Evaluation Office to strengthen networks and partnerships with regional offices. He expressed the hope that the newly launched evaluations of WHO's contribution at country level would be used in future implementation and quality improvement of the Organization's programmes. Further work was needed to strengthen the leadership and capacity of the Evaluation Office to ensure the effective implementation of the draft fourteenth general programme of work, 2025–2028, and the monitoring of activities in regional and country offices.

**The Board noted the report and approved the Organization-wide evaluation workplan for 2024–2025.<sup>2</sup>**

**Dr dos Reis Amaral took the Chair.**

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<sup>1</sup> Participating by virtue of Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.

<sup>2</sup> Decision EB154(2).

**Matters emanating from the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Budgetary, Programmatic and Financing Governance:** Item 25.3 of the agenda (documents EB154/32, EB154/33, EB154/33 Add.1, EB154/33 Add.2, EB154/33 Add.3 Rev.1, EB154/33 Add.5, EB154/34, EB154/34 Add.1, EB154/34 Add.2, EB154/34 Add.3, EB154/34 Add.4 Rev.1, EB154/34 Add.5 and EB154/35)

The CHAIR invited the Board to consider the draft decision contained in document EB154/34 Add.4 Rev.1, which replaced the draft decision proposed in document EB154/33 Add.1. The financial and administrative implications of that decision were contained in document EB154/34 Add.5. She also invited the Board to consider the draft decisions contained in documents EB154/33 Add.3 Rev.1 and EB154/34, the administrative and financial implications of which were contained in documents EB154/33 Add.5 and EB154/34 Add.3 respectively.

The representative of CHINA, speaking in his capacity as Chair of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board, drew attention to paragraphs 42–51 of document EB154/4, particularly the recommendations therein that the Board note the reports and adopt the draft decisions contained in documents EB154/33 Add.3 Rev.1, EB154/34 and EB154/34 Add.4 Rev.1.

The representative of TOGO, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, said that continuous improvement of WHO's budgetary, programmatic and financing governance was essential to the efficacy and efficiency of the Organization and welcomed the governance reforms proposed by the Secretariat. He commended the progress made on the Secretariat implementation plan on reform and the inclusive approach to risk management involving regular dialogue with Member States on their priorities and recommendations. The dashboard on the Member States portal for monitoring the Secretariat implementation plan was also welcome, as it improved transparency. The African Region remained committed to building a more resilient WHO that was better prepared for current and future challenges, and encouraged all reforms aimed at strengthening the Organization's governing bodies, in particular the project plan on the implementation of digital solutions for the governing bodies, which would enable in-depth analysis of working documents with due consideration of the specific features of each region, notably their different working languages. The Region likewise welcomed the proposals for improving the effectiveness of the WHO governing bodies. The Secretariat should continue discussions with Member States on strengthening governance, and further develop resource mobilization initiatives, ensuring that those resources were fairly allocated using a transparent, results-based approach, with full accountability.

The representative of FRANCE agreed that it would be useful for a group of Member States to continue the work of the former co-facilitators of the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Budgetary, Programmatic and Financing Governance. She welcomed efforts to apply the Secretariat implementation plan on reform, noting that governance reform was the vital counterpart to the ongoing financial reform of the Organization. Her Government was impressed by the Secretariat's dedication and ambition, and would follow progress on the reforms closely. The Secretariat should continue to report regularly to Member States in a transparent manner and maintain momentum over the long term.

The representative of CANADA commended the work carried out to date, particularly with regard to the agenda of the governing bodies, which was a major cross-cutting issue. Restraint was needed when proposing additional items for the agenda; it was important to consider what problem a particular item was intended to address and limit the inclusion of highly specific single-issue items. She agreed that the Officers of the Board should take a more active role in ensuring that additional agenda items would add strategic value to existing decisions, and therefore supported the proposals to update the memorandum for proposing new items for inclusion on the provisional agenda of the Executive Board

and develop terms of reference for the Officers of the Board. The re-establishment of the forward-looking planning schedule of expected agenda items for the governing bodies would benefit Member States and the Secretariat. The draft fourteenth general programme of work should serve as a guide in relation to ongoing governance reforms and efforts to secure sustainable financing for the Organization.

The representative of SWITZERLAND expressed support for the draft decision contained in document EB154/34 Add.4 Rev.1, observing that the proposals for improving the effectiveness of the WHO governing bodies would strengthen the Organization's central coordinating and leadership role in the global health architecture. Strengthening the mandate of the Officers of the Board would ensure that meetings ran more smoothly. The increasing length of sessions was no longer tenable; the agendas set by the Officers should be strictly observed to ensure that meetings were targeted and delegations could give sufficient attention to key issues, in order to provide strategic guidance to the Organization. She supported the proposed methodology for costing new initiatives and programmes, which would make it possible to focus on key discussions and allocate financial and human resources appropriately. The transition to more flexible support, however, must be accompanied by strengthened monitoring and follow-up mechanisms, and transparent resource allocation that ensured funds were fully traceable. Further consultations with Member States regarding funding allocations and the programme budget would ensure that their priorities were duly reflected. Efforts to improve transparency in the creation and filling of senior-level positions were welcome. Despite progress, more work remained to be done, and her Government therefore supported the establishment of an inclusive informal model for discussions on ongoing reform.

The representative of JAPAN expressed support for the draft decisions, emphasizing the importance of consulting Member States in all future discussions. He expressed concern that many documents were not submitted at least six weeks in advance of Board sessions, as required; he asked how the Secretariat intended to address that issue. Implementation of reform and reporting on progress was especially important in the light of the future increase in assessed contributions, and his Government looked forward to participating in further informal discussions on the subject.

The representative of AUSTRALIA agreed that the increasing length of Board agendas was cause for concern, as it affected the quality of strategic discussions. The governing bodies must be fit for purpose and enable Member States to meaningfully engage on the right issue, at the right level and at the right time. He therefore welcomed the recommendations in the reports, which should enable bold action to overcome the limitations of the current governing bodies structures. Steps taken by the Secretariat to improve the document preparation process were welcome, since the timely delivery of documents was required for in-depth engagement with their content. Member States played a key role in setting the agenda of the governing bodies, which must balance the number of items and resolutions with time constraints and the need for meaningful discussion; he therefore encouraged the prioritization of items aligned with the general programme of work. Concerning the handling of potential allegations against Directors-General, he supported the ongoing improvement efforts and stressed that an independent investigator would maintain the integrity of the process.

The representative of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA welcomed the progress made on the Secretariat implementation plan, which was aligned with the key goals of enhancing transparency and accountability, strengthening Member State oversight and fostering greater trust between Member States and the Secretariat. Her Government looked forward to the completion of open actions, yet recognized that some actions would require more time due to their costly or complex nature. She welcomed the continuation of the work of the Agile Member States Task Group under the informal leadership of the former co-facilitators to further improve the functioning of the governing bodies and the Secretariat, and to finalize the process of handling potential allegations against Directors-General.

The representative of CHINA commended progress with governance reforms, while stressing that those reforms must be led by Member States. The complication of existing mechanisms should be avoided, rather they should be optimized in a manner that did not increase the workload for Member States. Reform initiatives involving revisions to the WHO Constitution or the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board must be carried out with care to prevent the introduction of conflicting provisions.

The representative of the RUSSIAN FEDERATION<sup>1</sup> acknowledged the efforts made to enhance transparency and accountability within WHO but said that further progress was needed. The current format of the programme budget did not allow the financial requirements of the Organization to be thoroughly assessed; key objects of expenditure should be included in the draft budget, in line with United Nations best practice. Provision of a staffing table would also improve transparency. Such measures were particularly important as the Organization entered the next stage of negotiations regarding an increase in assessed contributions. Another important area of work for the Agile Member States Task Group would be to draw up options for improving the work of the governing bodies to optimize resources and to avoid overburdening delegates and the Secretariat. The meetings of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board should allow more in-depth, expert discussions, which could be achieved by grouping points on the agenda within reasonable limits and increasing the length of the session. The investigation of potential allegations against Directors-General should be performed by an appropriate department of another organization within the United Nations system. The Task Group should consider a return to its previous practice of drafting final reports, which – while time-consuming – allowed for more comprehensive work.

The representative of the REPUBLIC OF KOREA<sup>1</sup> commended the progress made on the Secretariat implementation plan. She acknowledged the challenges of timely preparation of the agenda and documents for the governing bodies, including on WHO's role in addressing health emergencies. All those challenges should be taken into account when establishing principles for sunseting or postponing items. In terms of digital solutions, the Secretariat should prioritize the development and funding of advanced platforms for Member States that would make it easy to search for key themes. The system for sharing official documents should also be streamlined and improved to ensure that they reached the right recipient; the current ad hoc contact management tools were prone to system failure.

The representative of NAMIBIA<sup>1</sup> welcomed the progress made in implementing decisions EB152(15) (2023) on the recommendations of the Agile Member States Task Group and EB152(16) (2023) on the Secretariat implementation plan on reform. Challenges remained, however, particularly with regard to the management of agenda items, the lack of informed consultations due to limited time for document preparation and the lack of resources, including human resources, for strengthening results-based management, which was essential to improve accountability. Those challenges should be addressed through increased investment at the country level. Digital solutions should be user-friendly and based on existing tools and infrastructure, with high-level indicators to allow results-based monitoring and comprehensive tracking of progress on reforms. Greater support was needed for engagement in governing bodies processes, including through the provision of up-to-date information, regular briefings and training for Member States, Board Officers and members of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee. He agreed that better adherence to cost recovery methods and improved sustainable financing through the agreed increases in assessed contributions and flexibility in voluntary contributions would help to address the structural gap in current funding mechanisms.

The representative of THAILAND<sup>1</sup> commended efforts to streamline and improve the governance of the Organization, but underscored that any new mechanisms should not limit the rights of the Board

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<sup>1</sup> Participating by virtue of Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.



or Member States to take action as appropriate, including at meetings of the Board and the Health Assembly. In relation to the cost recovery mechanisms, improving the efficiency of the Secretariat would be as important as securing adequate funding; she called for greater efforts to close the structural funding gap.

The CHAIR took it that the Board wished to note the reports contained in documents EB154/32, EB154/33, EB154/33 Add.1, EB154/33 Add.2, EB154/33 Add.3 Rev.1, EB154/34, EB154/34 Add.1, EB154/34 Add.2 and EB154/35, and to concur with the recommendations contained in paragraph 51 of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee report contained in document EB154/4.

**It was so agreed.**

The CHAIR invited the Board to adopt the draft decision on proposals for improving the effectiveness of the WHO governing bodies contained in document EB154/34 Add.4 Rev.1.

**The decision was adopted.<sup>1</sup>**

The CHAIR invited the Board to adopt the draft decision on cost recovery mechanisms for voluntary contributions contained in document EB154/33 Add.3 Rev.1.

**The decision was adopted.<sup>2</sup>**

The CHAIR invited the Board to adopt the draft decision on matters emanating from the Agile Member States Task Group on Strengthening WHO's Budgetary, Programmatic and Financing Governance contained in document EB154/34.

**The decision was adopted.<sup>3</sup>**

**Dr Al Kuwari resumed the Chair.**

**Nomination and appointment of Regional Directors:** Item 25.5 of the agenda (documents EB154/38 and EB154/38 Add.1)

The CHAIR drew attention to the draft decision contained in document EB154/38. The financial and administrative implications of the draft decision for the Secretariat were contained in document EB154/38 Add.1.

The representative of CANADA agreed that it would be useful to consider how to strengthen regional processes relating to the election of Regional Directors, notably in terms of transparency, but stressed that any measures should be discussed by the regional bodies themselves. A minimum common standard for the processes for nominating Regional Directors could prove too prescriptive or limiting, and would represent a considerable extension of the Board's authority. However, the Board could set out examples of best practice for regional bodies to draw on as appropriate. The proposals in the document should be further developed to clarify what problems they were intended to address and how they would improve transparency, accountability or integrity; that would allow the regional committees

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<sup>1</sup> Decision EB154(3).

<sup>2</sup> Decision EB154(4).

<sup>3</sup> Decision EB154(5).

and Member States to discuss them further before making recommendations to the Board. Regarding the process for the election of the Director-General, the value of re-examining the issue at the current stage was not clear, as many of the proposed measures were already in place and the Secretariat and Member States were busy addressing other governance issues.

The representative of AUSTRALIA welcomed the opportunity to modernize the rules of procedure of the regional committees with a view to enhancing the transparency of the election and appointment process. Many of the proposals deserved due consideration, balancing the implementation of accepted best practice with a degree of autonomy, to take into account regional context. He therefore supported the proposal for the Secretariat to prepare a document for the regional committees on measures to enhance the transparency, accountability and integrity of the nomination processes for Regional Directors, to be followed by informal discussions. The holding of a virtual candidates' forum prior to the election of the Regional Director for the Western Pacific had enabled broad engagement while reducing the time needed for that item during the Regional Committee session and he would therefore support the formalization of such an initiative in future. He also supported the proposal to revise the process for the election of the Director-General; in order to allow time to consider the options, the Secretariat should prepare documentation for consideration by the governing bodies in 2025.

The representative of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA welcomed efforts to harmonize the processes for the nomination of Regional Directors but stressed the need to strike a balance between standardization and flexibility based on regional context. Member States must be able to select the candidates they believed were best for the region, while the general interests of the Organization as a whole must be safeguarded by ensuring the transparency, accountability and integrity of processes. A degree of harmonization was already under way, with three regions holding candidates' forums; the Regional Committees for Africa and Europe could consider doing the same, as that had worked well, but the decision was a matter for the relevant Member States. Her Government would support some revisions to the process for nominating Regional Directors, including the introduction of standardized criteria for Regional Director posts to create a minimum common standard; however, that should be based on applying criteria currently used in some, but not all, regions, rather than expanding the criteria. The Secretariat should prepare a more focused document for consideration by the regional committees, reflecting the discussions held to date and focusing on measures with broad support, such as the introduction of codes of conduct. Her Government supported the draft decision, although it did not wish to consider any changes to the terms of office for Regional Directors. She requested clarification of the different processes set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the draft decision.

The representative of the COMOROS, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, agreed that it would be useful to harmonize the processes for the nomination of Regional Directors in the interests of transparency, accountability and integrity. The specific contexts and regulations of each region should be taken into account and her Region would therefore welcome the proposal of measures to enhance transparency, accountability and integrity in consultation with Member States. The proposed measures should be submitted for consideration by the regional committees; sufficient time would be needed to ensure that Member States fully understood their implications. In terms of proposing candidates for the position of Regional Director, she stressed that the process must continue to be led by Member States to guarantee its independence and its ownership by regional committees. Member States from outside a region should not be permitted to propose candidates, nor should non-State actors, as that could give them undue influence. However, Member States within a region could be encouraged to consult non-State actors when proposing candidates for the position of Regional Director.

It would be premature for the Secretariat to suggest interim enhancements to the election process in respect of the upcoming nominations of Regional Directors in the African and European regions. Her Region supported the proposal to hold consultations with Member States during the intersessional period

to ensure that they fully understood the implications of any changes, however, it would not consider any change to the term of office of the Regional Directors, as that would require amendments to the rules of procedure. Her Region would comment further on the Secretariat's proposals during the informal consultations.

The representative of JAPAN expressed support for the broad aim of improving the transparency, accountability and integrity of the election process for Regional Directors. Given that it would be premature to make any significant changes prior to the elections in the African and European regions in 2024, and that no elections were scheduled for 2025, there was time to carefully consider any specific changes. The process for the election of the Director-General should also be revised along similar lines, as suggested. Any changes to regional processes would be a matter for the regions themselves, and should therefore be discussed by the regional committees, with the conclusions to be brought before the Board at its 156th session in early 2025.

The representative of CHINA aligned himself with the statement made by the representative of the African Region. Further consultation among Member States was needed and it would therefore be premature to adopt the draft decision.

The LEGAL COUNSEL said that the agenda item had been introduced in response to brief discussion at the Board's 153rd session of concerns among academics regarding the election process for Regional Directors. He confirmed that most of the measures proposed would need to be implemented by the regional committees themselves, however, the Board could issue guidance on the matter, as it had done in the past. Consideration should be given to whether the Board would prefer to provide a set of options or to establish minimum standards; that could be discussed further by Member States in the context of both the Board and the regional committees, as set out in paragraph 2 of the draft decision. Paragraph 2 dealt with the election process for the Regional Directors and made provision for initial consultations with the regional committees, followed by consultation of Member States, with the output of those consultations to be considered by the Board in 2025; the Board would then make decisions accordingly, for implementation by the regional committees. Paragraph 3 referred to the Director-General election process and made provision for a similar examination of that process, but any desired changes would have to be considered by the Health Assembly. It should be noted, however, that some of the measures proposed in the document had already been implemented for the Director-General election process. The Secretariat could prepare an updated document on election processes for the regional committees, taking into account the preferences already expressed by Member States, including the reluctance to change the term of office of Regional Directors.

The CHAIR took it that the Board wished to note the report contained in document EB154/38.

**The Board noted the report.**

The CHAIR invited the Board to adopt the draft decision.

The representative of JAPAN asked whether paragraph 1 of the draft decision would have any impact on the election processes for Regional Directors in the African and European regions in 2024.

The LEGAL COUNSEL clarified that the timing of the process set out in the draft decision meant that it would not affect the forthcoming regional elections. The Board had been invited to comment on whether any interim enhancements should be proposed for those elections, but discussion so far had indicated that the Board considered that a matter for the respective Regions.

The representative of RWANDA asked whether noting the report implied acceptance of the measures it proposed. Although the report had been noted, the Member States of the African Region did not agree with a number of the proposals contained therein.

At the invitation of the CHAIR, the LEGAL COUNSEL explained that, in line with practice across the United Nations system, noting a report did not indicate approval or disapproval of its content, but simply that the report had been received and considered.

The representative of AUSTRALIA said that he understood that the Secretariat would incorporate feedback from the current discussion into a revised document for consideration by the regional committees during 2024, with feedback from those consultations to inform further discussion in 2025. That would allow time to work through any issues and strike a balance between standardization and regional diversity. He expressed support for such an approach and for revision of the Director-General election process at the same time.

The representative of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA agreed to proceed on that basis, as long as the document prepared by the Secretariat took into account the current discussion and focused on a few key areas of agreement.

The representative of CAMEROON said that, since the report had been noted, further discussions should be held on the basis of the points made thus far, without returning to the elements that the Board had clearly rejected.

The DIRECTOR-GENERAL said that, although some changes to the election processes required careful consideration, others could be introduced quite rapidly, such as the candidates' live forums, which could easily be employed for the elections in the African and European regions in 2024. He thanked the Member States that had already agreed to introduce that measure. An open, transparent process was crucial to inspiring trust in WHO; the Board could be involved in such changes without undermining the role of the regional committees.

The representative of THAILAND<sup>1</sup> expressed concern regarding action taken against candidates during the election of the Regional Director for South-East Asia. Some candidates had been criticized on the basis that they were not medical doctors or public health experts, but that was not a prerequisite for successful leadership.

The representative of CHINA said that Member States had clearly expressed a need for more time. The Secretariat should provide an improved document for the Board's consideration, based on the current discussion. The draft decision as currently worded was not ready for adoption.

The representative of ETHIOPIA, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, proposed amendments to paragraphs 1 and 3 of the draft decision that were intended to ensure that consultations were held before any decisions were made. In paragraph 1, the words "to submit" should be replaced by the words "to prepare", and following the words "Regional Directors" the sentence should be amended to read: "in consultation with Member States, and submit this document to the regional committees in 2024 for their consideration". In paragraph 3, the words "to submit" should also be replaced by "to prepare", and following the word "Director-General", the words "in consultation with Member States, and submit this document" should be inserted.

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<sup>1</sup> Participating by virtue of Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board.

The representative of AUSTRALIA supported the proposed amendments, which he understood to be aimed at ensuring that the new document was a product of the consultations held, rather than a document that had been prepared by the Secretariat for subsequent negotiation.

The LEGAL COUNSEL said that, if the amendments were accepted, a consultation would be held with all Member States in mid-2024, which would feed into a document to be sent to the regional committees later in the year. Following discussion by the regional committees, further consultations would be held with all Member States, culminating in a potential final document for submission to the Board at the May/June session in 2025. That would provide for two rounds of consultations with all Member States, one before and one after the regional committees had held their annual session.

The representative of ETHIOPIA, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the African Region, said that it would be preferable to start the discussions at the regional level, prior to returning to the wider membership of the Organization, rather than having a two-stage process. She requested the further amendment of the draft decision to reflect that preference.

The representative of JAPAN asked whether the outcome of the second round of consultations would be submitted to the Board in the January/February or May/June session in 2025.

The LEGAL COUNSEL explained that it would have to be submitted to the May/June session of the Board, due to the timing of the regional committee sessions and to allow sufficient time for consultation.

The representative of DENMARK, supported by the representative of CHINA, said that, while he agreed with the general sentiment of the discussion, it would be easier to consider the amended draft decision in writing.

The CHAIR suggested that consideration of the item should be suspended pending the preparation of an amended draft decision.

**It was so agreed.**

(For continuation of the discussion and adoption of a decision, see the summary record of the fifteenth meeting, section 3.)

### **Right of reply**

The representative of DENMARK, speaking on behalf of the Member States of the European Union in exercise of the right of reply, said that he rejected the accusation made by the representative of the Russian Federation that the European Union was negatively affecting the work of WHO. On the contrary, it was the Russian Federation's illegal and unjustified aggression against Ukraine that was affecting the work of WHO and leading to direct and indirect health impacts with national, regional and global consequences. The Member States of the European Union considered it entirely justifiable for those issues to be addressed by WHO Member States and called on the Russian Federation to immediately cease its hostilities, including attacks on health care facilities and health workers.

**The meeting rose at 17:00.**

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