



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

FIFTY-FIFTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY
Provisional agenda item 2

A55/2
8 April 2002

Reports of the Executive Board on its 108th and 109th sessions

1. The Executive Board held its 108th session on 23 May 2001, and its 109th session from 14 to 21 January 2002. In addition, members of the Board participated in retreat (Florence, Italy) from 11 to 13 November 2001. A report of the main outcomes follows.

108th SESSION (23 May 2001)

2. With regard to the agenda item on **review of the working methods of the Executive Board** at the Fifty-fourth World Health Assembly, members of the Board emphasized the need for transparency and participation in governing body meetings. They advised reducing potential overlap between the discussions of the Board and the Health Assembly and better reflecting regional committee discussions in the Board.

3. Members commended both the framework for action set out in the Director-General's report on intensifying the **response to the conditions associated with poverty**, with its basis on the work of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, and efforts to mobilize resources.

4. The presentation on a proposed process for **revision of the WHO Model List of Essential Drugs** was welcomed.

5. WHO's initiatives on **food safety**, including the formulation of a draft strategy, were welcomed, with the importance of a risk-based approach being emphasized. Calls were made for the strategy to be finalized soon.

6. The Board adopted resolution EB108.R1 confirming **amendments to Staff Rules**, in particular standards of conduct for staff members and educational grants.

RETREAT

7. Members of the Board assembled in Florence, Italy, for a retreat which provided an opportunity to explore some of the issues that would be examined more extensively at the 109th session. Updates were presented on the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, WHO's work with the private sector, health systems' performance assessment, ethics and health, bioterrorism and access to medicines.

109th SESSION (14-21 January 2002)

8. The substantive work of the session began with the **report by the Director-General**. She highlighted major developments, including the Report of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health, international commitments to reduce HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria and the establishment of the Global Fund (see above), progress towards increasing access to medicines, the commencement of the review process for the assessment of health systems' performance, and the public health responses to the deliberate use of biological and chemical agents to cause harm. Other important steps included a strategy on infant and young child feeding, monitoring WHO's performance and improving administrative and management systems. Members particularly welcomed WHO's efforts to promote the issue of **mental health** and urged follow up. To that end, a resolution on strengthening mental health and continuing the work started in 2001 was adopted (resolution EB109.R8).

Health strategy matters

9. The discussion of WHO's involvement in **public-private interactions for health** covered the need for guidelines, codes of conduct, adherence to the principle of transparency and the training of staff. The Board requested WHO to continue its work accordingly. In the related area of **contractual arrangements** and their role in improving the performance of health systems, a draft resolution was adopted (resolution EB109.R10) which recommended that the Health Assembly request the formation of an evidence base for the evaluation of the impact of different types of contractual arrangements and devising ways to support Member States in accrediting, licensing and registering public, private and nongovernmental organizations in the health sector.

10. The Board noted the significant improvements in **the assessment of health systems' performance** and appreciated the suggestion of the advisory group that WHO would produce a summary report in October 2002 of the work on implementing resolution EB107.R8. A draft resolution was adopted (resolution EB109.R1) that called for an interim report to be submitted to the Executive Board at its 111th session in January 2003 and the publication of a statistical annex later that year. The resolution also requested the provision of the report to Member States before the intended date of publication.

11. There was a lively discussion on WHO's **essential drugs strategy** which highlighted the issues of selection of and access to essential drugs and the implications of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights for access to pharmaceuticals. The Board noted the evolution of the strategy and asked WHO to report further to the Fifty-fifth World Health Assembly. A consensual text was adopted (resolution EB109.R17) with a resolution recommended to the Health Assembly that included requests for strengthening of the Expert Committee on the Use of Essential Drugs, consideration of the impact of trade agreements on access to medicines, advocacy for promotion of differential pricing for essential medicines and the continued work on databases of reference prices.

12. Board members noted the progress towards formulating a strategy on **diet, physical activity and health**, and, in adopting a resolution (EB109.R2), recommended that the Health Assembly ask the Director-General to complete that exercise while giving priority to supporting Member States in establishing corresponding national policies and programmes. The strategy should be framed within the renewed WHO strategy for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases.

13. The Board endorsed WHO's actions towards scaling up and intensifying the response to **health conditions associated with poverty**, in particular its involvement in the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria and the follow-up to the work of the Commission on Macroeconomics and Health. In the discussion, participants set these actions in the context of the goals laid out in the United Nations Millennium Declaration and adopted a resolution (EB109.R3) that recommends that the Health Assembly adopt a resolution calling for WHO to report on measures taken to contribute to the attainment of these goals. Furthermore, it asks WHO to develop specific strategies on **child and adolescent health and development** and for accelerating progress towards attainment of the goals and targets for **reproductive health**.

14. For the first time the Board discussed **patient safety**, described as possibly the most important element of quality of health care. A draft resolution was prepared, taking into account comments made in discussion, and adopted, recommending to the Health Assembly a text that called for the formulation of norms and principles on the reporting of adverse events in health care, the promotion of evidence-based policies and ways of recognizing excellence in patient safety (resolution EB109.R16).

15. The process that followed the call for the revitalization of the global commitment to appropriate infant and young child nutrition, made by the Board at its 101st session in January 1998, is nearing fruition. A resolution adopted by the Board at its 109th session (EB109.R18) recommends that the Health Assembly endorse the **global strategy for infant and young child feeding**. It also calls for support in implementing the strategy, monitoring and evaluating its impact, the continued preparation of training materials for use in exceptionally difficult circumstances, and cooperation at all levels.

16. The increasing public health burden posed by the resurgence of **dengue and dengue haemorrhagic fever** was recognized. The Board adopted the proposed draft resolution (resolution EB109.R4) recommending the Health Assembly to adopt a resolution that urged greater commitment to and increased cooperation in prevention and control, building and strengthening of technical and systems capacity, intersectoral partnerships and new tools and strategies. It also calls on WHO to advance the global strategy for prevention and control of dengue and to continue to advocate and seek resources for research and development of such new tools and strategies.

17. Recent events have caused ministries of health in several countries to increase their state of alert and develop contingency plans to protect against the malevolent use of **biological and chemical agents**. Board members welcomed the revision of WHO's publications on the public health response to biological and chemical weapons. They adopted resolution EB109.R5, which was broadened to cover radioactive materials and which recommended a resolution to the Health Assembly that requested the Director-General to continue strengthening surveillance and issuing guidance and technical information widely and to support national health systems, in particular in emergency preparedness and response plans.

18. The possibility of outbreaks of **smallpox** resulting from deliberate use of *Variola virus* sharpened the debate on the destruction of virus stocks. At the same time, the WHO Advisory Committee on Variola Virus Research determined that the research programme on the virus would not be concluded by the end of 2002, the date set by the Health Assembly in resolution WHA52.10 for the destruction of *Variola virus* stocks. Members endorsed the Director-General's recommendations, including rapid completion of the research programme, continued supervision of research by the Advisory Committee and regular biosafety inspection, with a report of progress to the governing bodies in two to three years' time.

19. Member States are increasingly seeking the support of the international community to increase the capacity of their health systems to deal with HIV epidemics, a response to which the adoption by

the United Nations General Assembly of the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS has given greater impetus. The Board adopted a resolution on WHO's contribution to the follow-up of the General Assembly's special session on HIV/AIDS (resolution EB109.R6) that recommends to the Health Assembly a resolution that includes requests to the Director-General to continue to provide technical leadership, direction and support, to persevere with wide consultations on the global health-sector strategy, and to foster research into means of prevention and treatment.

20. Other topics discussed included the **health of children and adolescents** and the draft global **food safety** strategy, which the Board endorsed. The report on **violence and health** touched a chord and members agreed with the tasks proposed by WHO.

Programme and budget matters

21. Members of the Board noted the report on the **Meeting of Interested Parties, 2001**, and requested that the place of such meetings in the governance of WHO and the continuing need for consultation be taken into account.

22. During the discussion of the **priorities for the biennium 2004-2005** some members referred to access to medicines and child health as additional possible areas for consideration for the biennium 2004-2005.

23. Transitional arrangements are in hand relating to the Financial Incentive Scheme. In order to complete the transition rapidly, members adopted a resolution (EB109.R19) recommending to the Health Assembly a resolution authorizing transfer of interest earned on regular budget funds for the year ending 31 December 2001 (**miscellaneous income**) to Member States in the financial period 2002-2003.

Financial matters

24. In noting the report on the **status of collection** of Member States, the Board advised that it would be preparing resolutions for consideration by the Health Assembly regarding countries in arrears. Further, the Board agreed to recommend that the Health Assembly should maintain the **assessments for 2003** as set out in resolution WHA54.17.

25. The proposals on **revolving and other long-term funds** were endorsed. Specifically, the Board agreed to regular budget funding for the Information Technology Fund and approved the decision to establish a fund to ensure the security of WHO staff. It also adopted two resolutions recommending to the Health Assembly resolutions on the Real Estate Fund (resolution EB109.R20), authorizing *inter alia* the construction of a new building at headquarters, and a Revolving Sales Fund (resolution EB109.R21) to which all sale proceeds of WHO publications would be credited and related production costs debited.

Human resources

26. Dr Hussain A. Gezairy was reappointed as **Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean Region** for a five-year term as from 1 October 2002.

27. The Board noted the actions undertaken **to reform human resources management** in WHO, including the proposed new contractual arrangements. The Board, in resolution EB109.R14, confirmed the amendments made by the Director-General to implement the new contractual

arrangements and in resolution EB109.R15 recommended that the Health Assembly adopt a draft resolution amending the Staff Regulations to ensure consistency between them and the Staff Rules and to refer to the conditions concerning the eligibility of Regional Directors for reappointment.

Other management matters

28. Resolution WHA54.22 provided guidelines about how to proceed towards **reviewing the working methods of the Executive Board**. The Board responded by convening the Ad Hoc Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group to Review the Working Methods of the Executive Board and agreeing its terms of reference (decision EB109(2)). The Working Group will report to future sessions of the Board.

29. A Decision on the **timing of the sessions** of the Board was deferred for further discussion to the 110th session (20 and 21 May 2002 – decision EB109(11)). The Board adopted a resolution that proposed that the Health Assembly bring the **reimbursement of travel expenses** for members into line with policies for WHO staff (resolution EB109.R7).

30. The **centenary of the foundation of the Pan American Health Organization** falls in December this year and members of the Board adopted a resolution recommending the Health Assembly to congratulate that Organization on its achievements and to encourage its Member States to redouble their efforts to achieve equity in health (resolution EB109.R9).

31. The work of the committees of the Board was commended and their various reports were noted. The follow-up actions set out in the Joint Inspection Unit's review of management and administration in WHO, together with the report itself, were welcomed. Decision EB109(9) records the views of the Standing Committee on Nongovernmental Organizations.

32. Finally, the Board noted several matters presented for information, including reports on meetings of expert committees and study groups, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunization and the eradication of poliomyelitis.

33. The session was attended by some 48 Member States in addition to those entitled to designate a member of the Board.

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