



# WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

FIFTY-EIGHTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY  
Provisional agenda item 21

A58/39  
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## Implementation of multilingualism in WHO

### Report by the Secretariat

1. In May 2004, the Executive Board at its 114th session discussed the subject of multilingualism in WHO in depth, as this topic is being accorded increasing importance by WHO's Member States.<sup>1</sup> The matter was further discussed by the Board at its 115th session,<sup>2</sup> in conjunction with a case study on multilingualism in WHO issued by the United Nations Joint Inspection Unit.<sup>3</sup>
2. Following the discussion at the Executive Board at its 114th session (May 2004) a major project was launched to re-engineer WHO's web content management system and allow concurrent HTML posting of material in the six official languages. This involved making the technical changes necessary for three languages with non-Latin character sets; modifying the design and navigation of the public site; establishing appropriate editorial processes; expanding the web training and support programme, providing infrastructure, server and systems support, and translating the top-level content in the six official languages. WHO's multilingual web site was demonstrated to the Board at its 115th session (January 2005). The new version included about 500 new pages in each language, in addition to the considerable volume of governing body documentation – some 1500 documents – already accessible in the six languages on the Governance pages. The amount of content is expected to grow substantially.
3. In addition, a framework has been put in place which, when extended to departmental and regional sites, will enable staff throughout the Organization to post material on the web site using any of the six official languages for the original text. A customized search function was integrated into the site, allowing users to perform searches easily in any of the languages, as was a navigation tool which enables users to browse from one page directly to the same page in any other language without having to return to the home page.
4. The multilingual web site will continue to be improved and efforts will be made to issue technical material in the languages most appropriate for the target audience.
5. WHO's Library database WHOLIS is accessible worldwide on the web. It is the main access to the collective memory of WHO, containing close to 110 000 bibliographic records and more than 30 000 full text links to books and documents issued in the six official, and many other, languages by headquarters and regional offices. All full text files are stored in PDF format on the Library server at headquarters. Efforts are being made to increase access to a substantial number of monographs available at WHO in Arabic, Chinese and Russian. As many of these documents are unique and the

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<sup>1</sup> See document EB114/2004/REC/1, summary record of the sixth meeting, section 2.

<sup>2</sup> See document EB115/2005/REC/2, summary record of the twelfth meeting, section 2.

<sup>3</sup> Document JIU/REP/2003/4.

hard copy needs to be preserved, ways are being considered to convert them into an electronic format and make them available through WHO's web site. In addition, the Library's database web interface will, in the short term, be modified to allow easy access to the language full-text link within a document.

6. Multilingualism is an important aspect in broadening the audience of WHO publications for improving health. WHO books and reports are translated and published in many countries under license from the organization. In 2004 a total of 211 contracts were concluded for the outside publication of translations of WHO information materials. As a result, an estimated 350 000 translated editions of WHO information materials will reach readers in 42 languages. Publishers finance translation and production at no cost to WHO, and commercial publishers in upper-income countries also pay royalties on sales revenues. Electronic versions have been obtained of the most recent translations, together with permission to post them on WHO's web site.

7. A public-private initiative aiming at enabling scientists and health care workers in developing countries to access international biomedical journals was launched in 2002. A total of 65 publishers, including most of the major scientific presses, are now participating in the Health InterNetwork Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) by providing free or low-cost access to their publications for universities, schools of medicine, nursing, public health, dentistry, pharmacy, research institutions, teaching hospitals, and government offices in low-income countries. Journals currently accessible through HINARI are published in Croatian, Dutch, English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Ukrainian. This project continues to look for additional periodicals that can be offered to users in as many languages as possible on the condition that the publication is peer reviewed and accessible online.

8. More than 1400 institutions in 104 countries (out of a total of 113 eligible countries) in all regions are registered as HINARI users. WHO has developed training modules that are available in French, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and Serbian as well as English, and many institutions now hold regular training courses on use of HINARI. User support exists in French, English and Spanish will be available in Arabic and Portuguese in 2006.

9. In 2005, *The world health report* will be available in full in the six official languages. Governing body documents will continue to be made available in all languages as in previous years including the resolutions volume and the multilingual verbatim records. Further, it is planned to produce the summary records also in the six languages, with the addition of Arabic and Chinese. Disease Outbreak News, fact sheets and press releases, and home-page stories, are all rapidly available in the six languages.

10. Improving multilingualism is a long-term endeavour. A task force was established under the leadership of a special coordinator, comprising staff from headquarters and regional offices to provide information on issues of specific interest to WHO's regions. After reviewing the current situation, it identified problems and obstacles encountered across the Organization in implementing multilingualism. It will subsequently make proposals for improvement of multilingualism at WHO through a number of measures to be implemented in the medium term, together with an appropriate budget.

## **ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY**

11. The Health Assembly is invited to note the above report.