

Note for the Record

Meeting of the Director-General with the Officers of the Executive Board 16 September 2020

Participants

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General
Dr Harsh Vardhan (India) Chair
Dr Ahmed Mohammed Al Saidi (Oman) Vice-Chair
Dr Patrick Amoth (Kenya) Vice-Chair
Mr Björn Kümme (Germany) Vice-Chair
Dr Amelia Afuha'amango Tu'ipulotu (Tonga) Rapporteur

Observers

Dr F. M. Al Ajmi (Oman)
Dr S. Al Lamki (Oman)
Dr J. Al Abduwani (Oman)
H.E. Ms C. Rodriguez (Guatemala)

Secretariat

Dr Bernhard Schwartländer, Chef de Cabinet
Ms Jane Ellison, Executive Director, External Relations and Governance
Dr Timothy Armstrong, Director, Governing Bodies (GBS)
Mr Derek Walton, Legal Counsel
Mr Nicolas Ashforth, Team Leader, Documentation and Editing, GBS
Ms Denise Cipriotti, External Relations Officer, Governance, GBS
Ms Patricia Durand-Stimpson, Protocol Assistant, GBS
Ms Egle Granziera, Senior Legal Officer, Office of the Legal Counsel
Mr Jude Osei, Head of Unit, Protocol, GBS
Ms Gina Vea, Head of Unit, Governance, GBS
Ms Laurence Vercaemmen, Protocol Assistant, GBS

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

1. The Officers of the Executive Board met virtually with the Director-General on 16 September 2020, using video conference technology. As no Officer was available to represent the Region of the Americas, H.E. Ambassador Carla Rodriguez of Guatemala attended as an observer. In accordance with Rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure of the Executive Board, the meeting would review the existing draft Provisional agenda of the 148th session of the Board, to be held in January 2021, in order to prepare the Provisional agenda. In so doing, the meeting would also give consideration to the outcome of the written silence procedure, adopted through decision WHA73(7) (2020). In addition, the meeting would discuss possible modalities for the meetings of the governing bodies remaining to be held in 2020, namely: the special session of the Executive Board on the COVID-19 response; the thirty-second meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board; the Seventy-third World Health Assembly (resumed); and the 147th session of the Executive Board (resumed).

2. Welcoming the Officers, the Director-General reiterated his view that in the context of the current crisis, good communication was of great importance. In view of the difficulty of organizing more regular

communication through full meetings of the governing bodies, he invited the Officers, in addition to the agenda before them, to consider meeting on a more regular basis, perhaps once a month.

PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE 148TH SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

3. At the proposal of the Chair of the Executive Board, the Officers agreed to discuss together the item on the implications for the agenda arising from the written silence procedure and the item on the proposals for items to be added to the agenda.

4. The Secretariat explained that the written silence procedure, completed on 3 August 2020, had enabled four resolutions and eight decisions to be adopted. Of those, resolution WHA73.4 (on eye care) and decision WHA73(9) (on the Immunization Agenda 2030) requested the Director-General to take actions that were to be considered by the Executive Board at its 148th session. A further decision thus adopted – WHA73(15) (on WHO reform: governance) – requested the Director-General to “systematically include as substantive items on the agendas of meetings of the WHO governing bodies any global strategies or action plans that are scheduled to expire within one year in order to allow Member States to consider whether global strategies or action plans have fulfilled their mandates, should be extended and/or need to be adjusted.” As a result, the following needed to be considered by the Executive Board in January 2021:

- WHO global disability action plan 2014–2021: better health for all people with disability (resolution WHA67.7) (2014). As one of the additional items, proposed by the Governments of Mexico, Israel and New Zealand, concerned dealing with challenges faced by persons with disabilities in times of emergency, this could be taken up on the Provisional agenda under either Pillar 1 or Pillar 4;
- The global health sector strategies on, respectively, HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections, for the period 2016–2021 (resolution WHA69.22) (2016).

5. After discussing the outcome of the written silence procedure and the additional agenda items proposed by Member States, the Officers decided to **recommend** that the following items be **included** in the Provisional agenda, on the understanding that it was realistic and feasible for the Executive Board to deal with its agenda as amended:

- following the written silence procedure:
 - (i) **Immunization Agenda 2030, as new item 12**
 - (ii) **Integrated people-centred eye care, including preventable vision impairment and blindness, as new item 13**
 - (iii) the **global instruments** listed in **paragraph 4** above, through the creation of a **new item 19.3**, entitled “**Global strategies and plans of action that are scheduled to expire within one year**”;
- the item on **oral health**, proposed by the Government of Sri Lanka, which would be added as a **bullet** under **existing item 6**;
- the item on **mental health preparedness and response for the COVID-19 pandemic**, proposed by the Government of Thailand, under **Pillar 2** in view of the strong links with emergency preparedness, with the Secretariat to decide on its exact positioning within **item 14**;
- the item on **strengthening WHO’s global emergency preparedness and response**, proposed by the Government of the United States of America, which would be added as a **bullet** under **existing item 14.2**.

6. Following an explanation from the Secretariat, the Officers also recommended that the following items be deleted from the Provisional agenda:

- **Item 12.3 on Pandemic influenza preparedness: sharing of influenza viruses and access to vaccines and other benefits** as the Secretariat had submitted a report to be considered by the Seventy-third World Health Assembly at its resumed session,¹ in which the Secretariat explained that it had fully implemented the recommendations of the 2016 review to develop clear, harmonized and simplified reporting on implementation of the PIP Framework, and that all actions under resolution WHA64.5 and section 7.4.1 of the PIP Framework had been addressed;
- **Item 18.1 on Membership of the Independent Expert Oversight Advisory Committee** as matters concerning membership needed to be discussed at the 149th session of the Executive Board.

MODALITIES OF REMAINING GOVERNING BODIES MEETINGS IN 2020

7. The Secretariat explained that feedback from Member States indicated that there was general support for the idea of holding so-called “hybrid meetings” (with a mix of physical and virtual participation). The arguments in favour of this solution were that hybrid meetings allowed for greater interaction and informal discussion on the margins – particularly important for achieving consensus on controversial issues. With delegates physically present, it would be easier to manage agenda items where voting was required. In terms of room capacity, hybrid meetings were feasible, whether at WHO headquarters for the Executive Board and its Programme, Budget and Administration Committee or at the United Nations Palais des Nations for the Health Assembly. The Executive Board room at headquarters had the capacity to physically distance a maximum of 70 people. In this regard, hybrid meetings of the Board and the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee would involve having only the 34 members of the Board and 14 members of the Committee, respectively, physically present. Other delegation members, other Member States, and other participants, as appropriate, would participate through the virtual platform. With respect to the resumed session of the Seventy-third World Health Assembly, WHO had reserved Plenary Hall and Room 18 (Committee A room) at the Palais des Nations for the duration of the session. A hybrid format could therefore be used, in which one delegate per Member State would be physically present in Plenary Hall with required safety measures (e.g. physical distancing and face masks) while other delegation members and other participants, as appropriate, would participate virtually. A fully virtual meeting would be held in Room 18. Nevertheless, efforts would be needed in order to ensure equity between physical and virtual participants.

8. In their discussions, Bureau members were generally in favour of using the hybrid modality for the remaining governing bodies meetings in 2020. However, various matters would need to be borne in mind. The following were mentioned:

- Travel restrictions and quarantine arrangements
- Preserving equity between delegations, including for Member States that did not have a mission in Geneva

¹ Document A73/4 Add.1.

- Would those physically present inevitably have to bear a particularly heavy responsibility? Would such delegates have sufficiently detailed knowledge of complex, cross-cutting issues?

9. In response, the Secretariat mentioned that there were a limited number of diplomatic exemptions to quarantine that could be provided to the office bearers of governing bodies meetings. The Secretariat undertook to work with the Geneva missions and the Swiss Authorities to resolve travel-related issues. Regarding equity, every effort would be made to provide support to disadvantaged Member States. On the third point, those participating virtually would have an important role to play in providing support to their colleagues who were physically present.

10. Responding to a further question, the Secretariat mentioned the importance of holding more regular – perhaps monthly – meetings of the Officers of the Board. One option to explore would be to include the Regional Coordinators in such meetings to ensure good communication with Member States in general. The Director-General underlined that the physical presence of the Officers at the forthcoming meetings of the governing bodies would be an advantage as the Officers could be the engine of the Executive Board.

11. The Officers of the Board **recommended** that the hybrid option should be used for the forthcoming meetings, on the understanding that plans might need to be adjusted as the COVID-19 pandemic evolved.

NEXT STEPS

12. Following the meeting, the Secretariat undertook to prepare and circulate the Note for the Record, outlining the Officers' recommendations. The Provisional agenda of the 148th session of the Executive Board would also be prepared and circulated to Member States eight weeks before the opening of the session, together with the annotated version of the Provisional agenda, providing background details on the main technical and administrative reports.

13. The Secretariat would also send a letter to Executive Board members inviting them to decide through a written procedure on the modalities of the following meetings planned for 2020: the special session of the Executive Board on the COVID-19 response; the thirty-second meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board; the Seventy-third World Health Assembly (resumed); and the 147th session of the Executive Board (resumed). Once a decision had been taken, the Convocation letters for those meetings would be sent to Member States and other participants.

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