Regional Committee for Europe
70th session
Virtual session, 14–15 September 2020

Decision

Special rules and procedures for a virtual 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Preamble:

1. At its meeting on 15 May 2020, the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC) considered the report by the WHO Regional Director for Europe concerning arrangements for the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of the uncertain development of the epidemiological situation in the region, it was agreed to postpone the hosting of the Regional Committee in Tel Aviv, Israel, to a later date. The SCRC endorsed the proposal of the Regional Director that the 70th session should either be held at the seat of the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen, Denmark, or, if conditions would not allow for an in-person meeting as assessed by the SCRC, should be held virtually, similarly to the Seventy-third World Health Assembly held on 18–19 May 2020. It was agreed that, in the latter case, the agenda would only contain items essential for governance continuity and the strategic orientation of the work of the Regional Office.

2. The SCRC requested the Regional Director to seek the agreement of the Member States by written silence procedure on a draft decision to supersede the resolutions adopted at the 68th and 69th sessions on the date and venue of the 70th and 71st sessions. The procedure was launched on 29 May and lasted until 12 June 2020. No objections were received, and the Decision was considered adopted by the Regional Committee.

3. Having followed the development of the COVID-19 pandemic in the WHO European Region and in light of the continued uncertainties on whether it would be possible to effectively hold an in-person session, the SCRC decided at a special meeting organized on 29 June 2020 that the most prudent way forward was to convene a virtual de minimis session via videoconference. Member States were informed accordingly on 29 June 2020.

4. Special rules and procedures need to be put in place so that the Regional Committee can pursue its work during a virtual de minimis session. This draft decision is intended to enable
the Regional Committee to take a decision in that regard at the start of its session. The special rules and procedures to regulate the conduct of the virtual _de minimis_ session of the Regional Committee are set out in the Annex to the draft decision below.

5. Both the text of the draft decision and the special rules and procedures detailed in the Annex closely follow the arrangements adopted by the Seventy-third World Health Assembly. These were discussed with and accepted by the SCRC on 29 June 2020.

Therefore, in view of the foregoing, the **WHO Regional Committee for Europe**,  

Recalling its decision to hold its 70th session either at the seat of the Regional Office or virtually if the COVID-19 pandemic did not allow for an effective in-person meeting;

Taking note of the assessment reached by the SCRC that the conditions for an effective in-person meeting could not be ensured and that the Regional Committee should therefore meet in a virtual _de minimis_ session;

DECIDES to adopt the special rules and procedures to regulate the conduct of its virtual _de minimis_ session set out in the **Annex** to this Decision.
ANNEX: Special rules and procedures to regulate the conduct of the virtual de minimis 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

RULES OF PROCEDURE OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR EUROPE¹

1. The Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee shall continue to apply in full, except to the extent that they are inconsistent with these special rules and procedures, in which case the Regional Committee’s decision to adopt these special rules and procedures shall operate as a decision to suspend the relevant Rules of Procedure to the extent necessary in accordance with Rule 48 of the Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee.

AGENDA

2. Notwithstanding Rule 8 of the Rules of Procedure, the agenda of the Regional Committee will only include agenda items that are essential for governance continuity and the strategic orientation of the work of the WHO Regional Office for Europe, as proposed by the WHO Regional Director for Europe in consultation with the Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC). Remaining items will be postponed to the 71st session of the Regional Committee (RC71).

ATTENDANCE AND QUORUM

3. Attendance by Member States, States not members of the Regional Committee, invited representatives of the United Nations, specialized agencies and other regional international organizations shall be through secured access to videoconferencing or other electronic means, allowing representatives to hear other participants and to address the meeting remotely.

4. Attendance by non-State actors in official relations with WHO or accredited by the Regional Committee shall be through electronic means allowing representatives to hear other participants.

5. For the avoidance of doubt, virtual attendance of Members shall be taken into account when calculating the presence of a quorum in accordance with Rule 22 of the Rules of Procedure.

ADDRESSING THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE

6. Member States, States not members of the Regional Committee, invited representatives of the United Nations, specialized agencies and other regional international organizations, and

¹ This will affect notably the relevant provisions of the following Rules of Procedure of the Regional Committee:
   - Rules 8 and 9 (agenda)
   - Rule 41 and 44 (voting by show of hands or secret ballot)
non-State actors in official relations with WHO or accredited by the Regional Committee are invited to submit written statements of no more than 600 words in one of the working languages of the Regional Committee for posting on the WHO Regional Office for Europe website under the related agenda item. These are sent in advance of the opening of the 70th session of the Regional Committee (RC70). Written statements may be submitted in lieu of a live intervention or to complement a live intervention. Interventions on the items of Accreditation of regional non-State actors to the WHO Regional Committee for Europe, Matters arising from the resolutions and decisions of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board, and Progress reports will be limited to written statements only.

7. Member States, States not members of the Regional Committee, invited representatives of the United Nations, specialized agencies and other regional international organizations, and non-State actors in official relations with WHO or accredited by the Regional Committee shall also have the opportunity, if they so wish, to submit prerecorded video statements of no more than two minutes in duration in advance of the opening of the session, with an indication of the agenda item to which they refer. These video statements will be broadcast at the virtual meeting in lieu of a live intervention under the relevant item, except for those from non-State actors in official relations with WHO or accredited by the Regional Committee.

8. Written and video statements shall remain posted on the WHO Regional Office for Europe website in the language of submission until the adoption of the report of the 70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe. The content of the written and video statements will be summarized/reflected, in accordance with the usual practice, in the report of RC70.

9. During the virtual session, only Member States, States not members of the Regional Committee, invited representatives of the United Nations, specialized agencies and other regional international organizations shall be provided with the opportunity to take the floor. Individual statements will be limited to three minutes. Group statements will be limited to five minutes.

10. Any Member wishing to take the floor should signal their wish to speak. Notwithstanding Rule 25 and Rule 26 bis, any Member wishing to raise a point of order or exercise a right of reply in relation to an oral statement should signal its intention to do so. It is understood that, in accordance with well-established practice, any right of reply to an oral statement shall be exercised at the end of the meeting. Any Member wishing to exercise a right of reply in relation to a written statement should do so in writing as soon as possible and, in any case, no later than 10 working days after the closure of the relevant virtual session. The content of statements so submitted will be summarized/reflected, in accordance with the usual practice, in the report of RC70.

REGISTRATION AND CREDENTIALS

11. Online registration will follow normal practice. Additional information is provided in the related Circular Letter.
12. In accordance with Rule 3 of the Rules of Procedure, the names of representatives, which in the case of Members shall take the form of credentials, shall be communicated electronically to the Regional Director, if possible 15 days before the opening date of the Regional Committee. Given the need to facilitate virtual access to the meeting, all credentials and lists of representatives should be submitted electronically.

13. In accordance with Rule 14.2.10 (h) of the Rules of Procedure, a subdivision of three members of the SCRC shall assess, before the opening of RC70, whether the credentials of Members are in conformity with the requirements of the Rules of Procedure, and shall report to the Regional Committee accordingly during the opening meeting with a view to the Regional Committee making a decision thereon. The subdivision will assess whether credentials received after the opening meeting are in conformity with the requirements of the Rules of Procedure and will report immediately to the Regional Committee.

MEETINGS

14. The virtual session of the Regional Committee shall be broadcast on the WHO Regional Office for Europe website, in line with usual practice, with the exception of proceedings related to the item “Elections and nominations”.

DECISION-MAKING

15. All decisions of the Regional Committee taken during its virtual session should, as far as possible, be taken by consensus. In any event, given the virtual nature of the meeting and the technical impossibility at this time to guarantee the secrecy of the vote, no decision shall be taken by show of hands vote or by secret ballot. In the event of a roll-call vote, and in line with normal practice, should any delegate fail to cast a vote for any reason during the roll-call, that delegate shall be called upon a second time after the conclusion of the initial roll-call. Should the delegate fail to cast a vote on the second roll-call, the delegation shall be recorded as absent.

16. Brief statements consisting of explanation of votes may, if not made orally, be submitted in writing no later than three working days following the closure of the relevant virtual session. The content of the statements consisting of the explanation of votes will be summarized/reflected, in accordance with the usual practice, in the report of RC70.

17. The Regional Committee shall make every effort to conduct elections and nominations by consensus, in accordance with Rule 14.2.2 (b) of the Rules of Procedure. If it proves impossible to reach consensus on the seats vacant within a given subgroup for a specific governing body, elections and nominations shall be conducted by secret postal ballot in accordance with the present procedures. Within 10 days from the closure of the virtual RC70, the Regional Director shall send to each Member State that has registered for and attended the virtual RC70 a ballot paper and a standard envelope, and shall recall the modalities of the vote in accordance with Rule 46 of the Rules of Procedure. The Regional Director shall also indicate the deadline by which ballot papers have to be received in the Regional Office. Member States shall place their ballot papers in the standard envelope, seal it and return it by courier or registered letter to the Regional Office in a further sealed confidential envelope.
Two tellers appointed by the presiding officer in accordance with Rule 43 of the Rules of Procedure shall be invited to the Regional Office to open the envelopes and assist in the counting of the votes. Member States that have registered for and attended the virtual RC70 will be informed in advance of the date for this operation and may observe the proceedings remotely. If the number of candidates obtaining the required majority is less than the number of places to be filled, there shall be an additional ballot in accordance with Rule 46 of the Rules of Procedure under the same conditions.

**LANGUAGES**

18. For the avoidance of doubt, Rule 20 of the Rules of Procedure shall continue to apply, whereby speeches made in a working language shall be interpreted into the other working languages.