

164th SESSION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

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Provisional Agenda Item 7.8-A

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A. SEVENTY-SECOND WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY

1. The Seventy-second World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization (WHO) was held 20-28 May 2019 in Geneva, Switzerland, and attended by representatives and delegates of 194 Member States. The President of the Assembly was Laos, represented by Minister of Health Bounkong Syhavong. Five countries served as Vice Presidents: Bhutan, Mexico, Senegal, the United Arab Emirates, and Uzbekistan, in representation of their respective regions.

2. Ms. Socorro Flores Liera, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Mexico to the United Nations (UN) Office and other international organizations in Geneva, served as Vice President of the Assembly, representing the Region of the Americas, and in that capacity had the opportunity to lead the plenary session of the Assembly on several occasions. Paraguay served as Rapporteur of Committee A and Guyana as vice-chair of Committee B. The Americas was represented at the General Committee by the Bahamas, Cuba, Honduras, and the United States; and in the Committee of Credentials by the Dominican Republic and Suriname.

3. In his opening remarks, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, described the achievements of the past year with an emphasis on the “triple billion” targets in the 13th General Programme of Work (GPW13). The Director-General spoke of the progress made toward universal health coverage (UHC) over the last year and praised the UHC laws that had been passed in countries such as the Philippines, Egypt, and El Salvador, among other examples. Dr. Tedros emphasized his belief that primary health care (PHC) “is where the battle for human health is won or lost” (1), citing the unanimous endorsement of the Declaration of Astana as a vital affirmation that UHC is not possible without PHC.

4. The Director-General enumerated several initiatives aimed at addressing the world’s leading causes of death and disease in which WHO is involved, including: the launch of the world’s first malaria vaccine in Malawi and Ghana, the development of a draft global strategy to accelerate cervical cancer elimination, the release of the 11th Edition of the International Classification of Diseases, the first UN High-Level Meeting on Tuberculosis, and the formation of new partnerships to address the threat of antimicrobial resistance.

5. The Director-General also spoke about the emergencies that WHO is responding to in the world, such as Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where there have been many attacks on health workers. Dr. Tedros paid tribute to Dr. Richard Valery Mouzoko Kibounga, WHO epidemiologist, who died in one of these attacks, and emphasized the importance of unity in the fight to end the Ebola outbreak, rather than incurring “the very real risk that it [Ebola] will become more widespread” (1). Taking into account the 481 emergencies and potential emergencies that WHO responded to in the last year, such as the cholera outbreak in Yemen, diphtheria in Cox’s Bazaar, and the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Syria, Dr. Tedros believed that WHO’s new division of emergency preparedness, coupled with WHO’s existing work on emergency response, would play a critical role in supporting countries to put in place the necessary measures to prepare for and prevent emergencies.

6. The Director-General reiterated his belief that a key to success in delivering an impact in countries and making a measurable difference in the lives of the people was the need for a stronger, transformed WHO, noting the wide-ranging WHO reforms that were announced in March 2019. In order to execute the GPW13, the Director-General urged all countries to approve the Programme budget for the 2020-2021 biennium that was developed and support the WHO’s new processes aiming to modernize the Organization, cut bureaucracy, and enhance responsiveness. In closing, Dr. Tedros highlighted the three priorities that should guide countries’ discussions during the Assembly and over the next year: *a) health and political leadership; b) health partnerships; and c) people-centered health care.*

7. Richard Horton, Editor-in-Chief of *The Lancet*, and Natasha Chibesa Wang Mwansa, a student from Zambia, were special guests at the opening session of the Assembly. The Director-General also announced the appointment of four new goodwill ambassadors to promote healthier lives, stronger health workforces and improved mental health globally, three of which were from the Region of the Americas.

8. During the Assembly, there was active participation and involvement from countries of the Region of the Americas in negotiations regarding resolutions and sponsoring side events. Speaking at the plenary of the Assembly, Member States of the Americas reaffirmed their commitment to achieving, or strengthening, universal health and shared their experiences.

9. There were a variety of notable awards and recognitions for countries and people of the Americas during the Assembly. Argentina was officially certified as malaria-free by WHO. In a ceremony held during the Assembly, the district of Iguain, Peru was awarded the WHO Sasakawa Health Prize for its work to reduce the rate of anemic children under three from 65% to 12% over a three-year period (2016-2019). Additionally, Peter Figueroa, Jamaican doctor and Professor of Public Health, Epidemiology and HIV-AIDs at the University of the West Indies, was recognized as a health leader for his substantial contribution to public health in Jamaica, the Caribbean, the Americas, and the world over the past four decades.

10. The agenda of the Assembly included general items related to technical and health issues, as well as administrative, budgetary, and institutional items. As on previous occasions, these matters were dealt with in committees A and B, and in plenary sessions.

11. The documents related to this report can be consulted at the WHO website: http://apps.who.int/gb/e/e_wha72.html.

12. A list of the resolutions and decisions adopted by the World Health Assembly that are of interest to the Region, the related PAHO resolutions, and some of the implications that the resolutions have for the Region will be presented to the 57th Directing Council. At the time of development of this report, the resolutions and decisions adopted by the Assembly were not available.

Other Matters: Executive Board

13. The 145th Session of the Executive Board was held on 29-30 May 2019. The Chair of the Executive Board was Dr. Hiro Nakatani, of Japan. The United States of America was elected as Rapporteur. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Grenada, and Guyana currently occupy the other five seats of the Board that represent the Region of the Americas. Furthermore, with the end of term of Mexico, Chile will occupy the second seat of the Americas in the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee (PBAC). The Region has two seats in the PBAC; the second Member State of the Americas is Brazil.

14. The agenda of the 145th Session of the Executive Board consisted of 16 items, including governance reform, standardization of medical devices nomenclature, and the statement by the representative of the WHO Staff Association, among others.

15. Finally, the Board took note of the reports submitted. The Executive Board decided that the Seventy-third World Health Assembly be held at the Palais des Nations, in Geneva, starting on 17 May 2020 and ending no later than 21 May 2020. The Board also decided that its 146th Session would begin on 3 February 2020, at WHO headquarters in Geneva, and would end no later than 8 February 2020; that the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board would hold its 31st meeting on 29-31 January 2020, at WHO headquarters in Geneva.

16. The full versions of these reports, as well as other related documents, can be consulted at the WHO website: https://apps.who.int/gb/e/e_eb145.html.

Action by the Executive Committee

17. The Executive Committee is invited to take note of this report and provide any comments it deems pertinent.

References

1. World Health Organization. Opening address by Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General [Internet]. 72nd World Health Assembly; 20 May 2019; Geneva, Switzerland. Geneva (Switzerland): WHO; 2018. Available at: <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/world-health-assembly>.

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