



EUROPE

Fifteenth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe Fifth session

**Palais des Nations, Geneva, 18 May 2008
(Salle XII)**

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Report of the fifth session

Introduction

1. The Fifteenth Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC) held its fifth session at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 18 May 2008. Apologies were received from Professor Tomica Milosavljevic, the member from Serbia.
2. In his opening remarks, the WHO Regional Director for Europe reported that he had recently attended a meeting of the Global Policy Council, which had brought together the regional directors and the Director-General of WHO to prepare for the Sixty-first World Health Assembly (WHA61). A strong common view and a spirit of “one organization” had been evident during the meeting. All technical items on the agenda of WHA61 were of relevance to the European Region; however, a number of “political” issues were also likely to arise (such as the situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and the Gaza strip, China (Province of Taiwan) and the United Nations Administered Province of Kosovo). Other points discussed at the meeting had included the question of how best to manage the global health “architecture” and how to tackle the difficult budget situation caused by the fall in the value of the United States dollar, which had led to an effective reduction of 25% in the budget for the WHO European Region when expressed in terms of other currencies. That shortfall, the largest being faced by a WHO region, was having an impact on programme implementation and the achievement of expected results in the current biennium.
3. The agenda and programme of the Fifteenth SCRC’s fifth session were adopted without amendment, as was the report of its fourth session (Copenhagen, 31 March – 1 April 2008). The Deputy Regional Director reported on the steps taken to give effect to the recommendations contained in that report: the provisional programme of the fifty-eighth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (RC58) had been modified, the substantive working papers and draft resolutions had been amended, the agreement concerning the geographically dispersed office (GDO) in Athens had been revised, and discussions were continuing with the Council of Europe on the question of blood transfusion and organ transplantation.

Final review of the provisional programme of the fifty-eighth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

4. The Standing Committee welcomed the revised programme of RC58. It suggested that the title of the agenda item on stewardship/governance of health systems in the European Region should be amended to make explicit reference to the WHO European Ministerial Conference on Health Systems (Tallinn, 25–27 June 2008), and that an extra 30 minutes should be devoted to the agenda item on follow-up to previous sessions of the Regional Committee. The SCRC also mandated the Regional Director to explore the feasibility of holding a meeting of the Policy Advisory Council of the Health Worker Migration Policy Initiative (under the Global Health Workforce Alliance) either immediately before or after RC58, and to invite Mary Robinson, the co-chair of the Policy Advisory Council, to deliver a short address to the Regional Committee.

Membership of WHO bodies and committees

5. The Standing Committee made an initial review of candidatures received for membership of the Executive Board, the SCRC, the Policy and Coordination Committee of the Special Programme of Research, Development and Research Training in Human Reproduction, and the Regional Search Group, discussing the latter in a private meeting. The Chairperson of the Standing Committee would hold further discussions with representatives of Member States concerned during WHA61.

Final review of draft documents and draft resolutions for the fifty-eighth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Behaviour change strategies: the role of health systems

6. The Director, Country Health Systems informed the SCRC that the working document had been rewritten as agreed at its previous session. The title had been broadened to emphasize the role of health systems, and the body of the paper had been restructured along the lines of the presentation he had made on that occasion. One open question was whether the Standing Committee would recommend that a draft resolution should be submitted to RC58, or whether it considered that the topic still represented “work in progress”.

7. The Standing Committee welcomed the redrafted paper, which it felt embodied a well-balanced approach to a complex subject. It believed that a short resolution would be useful for a number of reasons: a) to highlight the importance of the issue; b) to emphasize the links between behaviour change and the social determinants of health; c) to position the European Region for the debate at the World Health Assembly in 2009 on the report of the Commission on the Social Determinants of Health and for the global action plan for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases; and d) to support robust methodology for the evaluation of existing behaviour change strategies. The SCRC looked forward to considering an amended version of the draft resolution (in conjunction with its review of the outcomes of the Ministerial Conference) at its next short session, to be held in Tallinn on 27 June 2008.

Stewardship/governance of health systems in the WHO European Region

8. The Deputy Regional Director noted that, as requested by the SCRC, a number of changes had been made to the working document. More attention had been paid to the goal of health gain and to the national context (centralized/decentralized, public/private system, etc.), the contributions of other organizations had been highlighted, as had the role of individual citizens, and more examples had been given of intersectoral action. The amended paper also considered questions of governance in the private sector (a topic that had been discussed at the Third Preparatory Meeting for the Ministerial Conference, held in Rome on 3 and 4 April 2008) and underlined the need for countries to “benchmark” their own situation for the purposes of performance assessment.

Proposed programme budget 2010–2011

9. The Director, Administration and Finance noted that the RC58 paper giving the European Region’s perspective on the Organization’s proposed programme budget 2010–2011 could not be prepared until discussions at global level were completed in June 2008, after WHA61. He had, however, attended a recent meeting of the Programme, Budget and Administration Committee of the Executive Board (PBAC), at which the performance of the 2006–2007 programme budget had been assessed. In that context, detailed information had been provided concerning the budget “carry-over” from that biennium of US\$ 1.6 billion. Approximately half of that sum had been received by the Organization in the last few months of the biennium, and much of it had been needed to meet staffing costs at the start of the current biennium. Some of the “carry-over” was due to a major change in accounting practice, whereby expenditure was now not registered as incurred until service had actually been delivered. The “carry-over” also included a significant amount of funds received from global partnerships hosted by the Secretariat; to increase transparency, those funds would in future be presented separately from the Organization’s own resources. Lastly, it was unclear how much of the “carry-over” was deliberate and planned; the introduction of the Organization’s new Global Management System (GSM) would give a more refined picture of the situation at any time.

10. The Standing Committee noted that, if attempts to obtain more unearmarked voluntary donations were successful, that would increase the need for more transparent reporting of the use of funds. It welcomed that detailed explanation of the “carry-over” and recommended that it should be

given to all Member States and the World Health Assembly as a whole, to inform their discussions about the level of assessed contributions in 2010–2011. Equally, the Vice-Chair and the Director, Administration and Finance were urged to provide the same information to RC58.

Presentations by SCRC members of consensus views on technical and policy subjects to be discussed at the fifty-eighth session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

11. The Secretariat had drawn up short briefing papers to help members of the SCRC prepare their presentations of agenda items at RC58. The individuals concerned agreed that they would send their presentations to the Secretariat for circulation to all SCRC members at the latest 10 days before the Tallinn Conference. Consensus could then be confirmed at the short SCRC session to be held immediately after the Conference.

Review of the provisional agenda of the Sixty-first World Health Assembly (Geneva, 19–24 May 2008)

12. A detailed review of the provisional agenda of WHA61 would be made at the customary meeting with representatives of all Member States, to be held immediately after the current SCRC session.

Other matters

Officers of RC58

13. The Minister of Health of Georgia had agreed to serve as President of RC58; the Chair and Vice-Chair of the SCRC would be proposed as Executive President and Deputy Executive President, respectively. The Secretariat would identify a suitable person to serve as Rapporteur.

WHO European Ministerial Conference on Health Systems – progress report on preparations

14. As noted above, the Third Preparatory Meeting for the Ministerial Conference had been held in Rome on 3 and 4 April 2008, and the third meeting of the Charter Drafting Group had been held in Moscow on 12 and 13 May 2008. A fourth and final preparatory meeting was due to be held in Brussels on 6 June 2008. Documentation was being finalized, logistics and administrative arrangements were being fine-tuned by the host country (a simulation exercise would be carried out in Tallinn later in the week), and a media event had been held with the Ministry of Social Affairs. Thirty ministers had already confirmed that they would attend the Conference.

15. The SCRC commended the entire preparatory process as ensuring that all Member States felt a sense of full “ownership” of the Conference and its outcome; it was a model to be followed for future conferences. The Regional Director would write a message on his “web log” informing staff of the strong support given to them by the Standing Committee.

Geographically dispersed office in Athens – progress report

16. The agreement concerning the geographically dispersed office (GDO) in Athens had been revised in line with the SCRC’s comments. The Greek government had accepted the amendments, and the agreement would be signed in the near future.