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Eighteenth Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe – report of the fifth session

This document contains the report of the Eighteenth SCRC's fifth and final session (held in Baku, Azerbaijan on 11 September 2011, the day before the opening of the sixty-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe). It should be read in conjunction with the consolidated report on the work of the Eighteenth SCRC (document EUR/RC61/4).

Introduction

1. The Eighteenth Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC) held its fifth and final session at the Gulustan Palace in Baku, Azerbaijan on Sunday 11 September 2011, the day before the opening of the Regional Committee's sixty-first session (RC61).
2. Apologies were received from the SCRC members from Bulgaria, Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. In addition to the formally identified European members of the Executive Board who were (current and incoming) links with the Standing Committee (Estonia and Germany), the SCRC agreed that other European members of the Board could attend the session as observers.
3. In her opening statement the Regional Director informed the Eighteenth SCRC that, since its previous session, the Regional Office had done further work on the new European policy for health – Health 2020 and finalized preparations for RC61 (including through several teleconferences with the SCRC). Two preparatory meetings had been held in Baku on 10 September 2011 and in the morning of 11 September: the former for high-level delegates from selected newly independent states and Georgia, and the latter for representatives of 18 countries with a high tuberculosis burden. The second meeting had also been attended by Professor Michel Kazatchkine, Executive Director, Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (the Global Fund).
4. The Eighteenth SCRC approved the report of its fourth session without amendment.

Measures for flood prevention at the premises of the WHO Regional Office for Europe in Copenhagen

5. The Regional Director reported that WHO's Regional Office premises in Copenhagen (which were located next to a sewage pumping station) had suffered severe flooding caused by cloudbursts three times within the previous year. The two most recent incidents had happened on 2 July and 14 August 2011. The floods had caused extensive damage to buildings and property, which had led to significant costs for WHO and for the Danish Palaces and Properties Agency, who made the property available to WHO on behalf of the Danish government. The health and safety of the staff were of paramount concern, and independent assessments of occupational health hazards and of the buildings' structural integrity had accordingly been carried out after each flood.
6. In close collaboration between WHO, the Palaces and Properties Agency, Copenhagen Commune and Copenhagen Energy (KE), the agency responsible for public sewerage, steps had recently been taken for temporary protection of the property. In addition, a permanent solution (in the form of a transport pipe from the area around the pumping station, under the Regional Office premises and out to sea) had been agreed upon. The necessary work would be completed by 1 October 2011.
7. The Standing Committee commended the Regional Director and her staff on having successfully continued their work under very difficult circumstances and expressed the hope that WHO had received assurances from the Danish government that everything possible was being done to remedy the situation and prevent it occurring again.

Consolidation of WHO/Europe's environment and health programmes

8. The Regional Director informed the SCRC that the government of Italy had finally decided not to continue funding the Rome Office of the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health. The latter Office therefore had to close but, thanks to extremely generous support from the government of Germany, most of its operations would be transferred to the Centre's Bonn Office. Agreements had been reached with all professional staff in Rome concerning continuation of their contracts of employment with WHO, while the contracts of (locally recruited) general service staff would not be renewed. As from the beginning of 2012, the Bonn Office would have an extended profile focused on technical work and development of evidence, while strong overall strategic and policy guidance would be ensured by the Coordinator, Environment and Health in Copenhagen. WHO was very grateful to the Italian government for the support it had given to the European Centre for Environment and Health over a period of 20 years.

9. The Standing Committee expressed its gratitude to the government of Germany for maintaining and expanding its support for the Bonn Office.

Review of the provisional programme of the sixty-first session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

10. The Regional Director informed the SCRC of final amendments to the provisional programme of RC61. The President of Azerbaijan would address the Regional Committee at the opening meeting, while the First Lady of Georgia (a WHO goodwill ambassador in the European Region for the health-related Millennium Development Goals – MDGs) would most likely attend the ministerial lunch on the first day. A short ceremony to celebrate the strengthened partnership between WHO/Europe and the Global Fund would be held after lunch on the Monday. Following a “ministerial day” on Tuesday, two full meetings on Wednesday morning would be devoted to the subject of WHO reform. It was envisaged that the report of the Regional Committee's discussions, both in plenary and in three working groups, would constitute substantive input into preparation of documents for the special session of the Executive Board to be held in November 2011.

11. The Standing Committee called for more exhaustive preparations to be made for the working group discussions on WHO reform. In response, the Regional Director offered to hold detailed briefing meetings with the facilitators (drawn from serving members of the SCRC and Executive Board) and independent “resource persons” for each of the three working groups.

12. The SCRC member from Poland informed the SCRC that, in its capacity of currently holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, his country was organizing an expert conference of the National Public Health Institutes Network on strengthening public health in Europe (Poznan, 5–6 November 2011), followed by a ministerial conference on “Solidarity in health – Closing the health gap between European Union states”. The Regional Director confirmed that the Regional Office, with its new global responsibility for relations between WHO and the European Union, would continue to work closely with all countries holding the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

13. The Director, Programme Management informed the SCRC that, as part of the discussions on WHO reform, and notably of the managerial reform component, the approach developed by the Regional Committee of using the Organization's programme budget as a strategic tool for accountability would be presented to RC61 for information rather than

adoption. If the Regional Committee approved in principle of the approach (as set out in document EUR/RC61/Inf.Doc./10), it could be piloted in the European Region for one year before being submitted to RC62 for endorsement.

14. The Director, Information, Evidence and Research noted that demonstrations of the Regional Office's atlas on social inequalities would be given throughout the coming week, while the technical briefing on Monday was on setting targets for Health 2020.

Membership of WHO bodies and committees

15. The Eighteenth SCRC reviewed the remaining steps that needed to be taken by its Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson with a view to securing consensus on the nominations for membership of WHO bodies and committees that would be considered at RC61.

Draft plan of work of the Nineteenth SCRC, 2011–2012

16. The SCRC considered a first draft plan of work for the coming year and noted that it might be necessary to hold a videoconference meeting in June 2012 to prepare for RC62 (as has been done in 2011). It was also informed that the Regional Office was planning to hold a one-day meeting of the European Health Policy Forum in Israel on 27 November 2011, following by a two-day conference on Health 2020.

17. The Chairman recalled that the Nineteenth SCRC should take up the question of the Standing Committee's oversight function.