

70th session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Intervention by Finland

Liaison between the WHO Executive Board and the
Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe

Statement on Matters arising out of resolutions and decisions of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board (EUR/RC70/5)

Director-General,
Regional Director,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am giving this statement on behalf of Finland, member of the Executive Board Bureau and in that capacity Liaison between the EB and the Regional Committee and the Standing Committee. We would like to thank you for your trust to ensure this link between the global and regional governing bodies during the past two years.

I will provide a brief update of the outcome of this year's World Health Assembly. As you know, 73th WHA was held as a virtual de minimis session on 18-19 May. A resumed session is provisionally planned for November.

Despite the challenging context, the WHA managed to adopt an important resolution WHA73.1 on COVID-19 response. I will not elaborate on this as the Regional Director in his report to the RC already covered the response and the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic at regional level. Also, the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPR) is still to start its work and the EB will discuss in early October the state of implementation of this resolution.

In the wake of the May session, 5 additional resolutions and 4 decisions were adopted through the written silence procedure in advance of the resumed session. I will briefly elaborate on the items that are of particular relevance to our region.

First, Resolution WHA73.2 on Cervical cancer prevention and control: accelerating the elimination of cervical cancer as a global public health problem. In the Europe Region, over 70% of the Member States have now introduced HPV vaccines, and this has had immediate effects in decreased infection prevalence and incidence of pre-cervical cancer diseases. Still, in order to in reaching the 2030 elimination goals, more efforts are needed to identify and ensure the necessary funding, especially in the low- and middle-income countries.

With respect to Resolution WHA73.3 on Global strategy for tuberculosis research and innovation, the European TB Research Initiative was established to boost progress towards ending TB in the Region, involving key actors in the TB arena (such as public health specialists, national programme representatives, key partners and community representatives). This also helps the introduction of new treatment regimens as well as the application of digital health solutions for data collection and patient management.

Resolution WHA73.4 on Integrated, people-centred eye care, including preventable vision impairment and blindness reminds us that eye care is an area that deserves more attention in our region, with still large inequities in low- and middle-income countries, and 2.7 million people affected by blindness, which can often be avoided through early prevention and appropriate treatment. This resolution supports the acceleration of actions undertaken and tools developed by the Regional Office to support countries in the prevention of blindness, such as the analysis of diabetic eye screening programmes or the assessment of unmet needs for assistive technology.

Resolution WHA73.5 on Strengthening efforts on food safety requests WHO to update the global strategy for food safety. This should provide strategic direction to further strengthening food safety in the WHO European Region, where yearly still an estimated 23 million people are falling ill and approximately 4,700 people are dying from consuming unsafe food. A “One Health” approach to food safety, tackling the entire food chain and mindful of the crosscutting factors affecting food safety, is crucial for managing food safety risks effectively. This is firmly support by the Action Plan to Improve Public Health Preparedness and Response in the WHO European Region 2018-2023, as well as by the WHO food safety and zoonotic diseases programme in the European Region, which aims to strengthen national food safety systems with

particular focus on improving the core capacities for zoonotic diseases and food safety as defined under the IHR (2005).

Resolution EB146.R10 on Strengthening preparedness for health emergencies: implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005) was not adopted through the silence procedure. It will be considered at the resumed session of WHA in November under the agenda item 13.2 WHO's work in health emergencies.

Lastly, four important decisions were adopted through the silence written procedure, namely

- Decision WHA73(9) on Immunization Agenda 2030,
- Decision WHA73(11) on the Global strategy and plan of action on public health, innovation and intellectual property,
- Decision WHA73(12) on the Decade of healthy ageing, and
- Decision WHA73(14) on Influenza preparedness.

In these areas, we have been very proactive in our region, as these are long-standing health priorities for European Member States.

Dear Ministers, representatives, your Excellencies, it is of great importance that we ensure implementation of the globally adopted resolutions and decisions in our region, especially since the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic is showing us that only through a strong joint political commitment, our efforts will come to fruition.

We have a lot to do, both globally, as well as within our Region, and we need to remain focused and determined.

Thank you for your attention.