



EUROPE

Fourteenth Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe Fifth session

WHO headquarters, Geneva, Sunday 13 May 2007

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Report of the fifth session

Introduction

1. The Fourteenth Standing Committee of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe (SCRC) held its fifth session at WHO headquarters in Geneva on 13 May 2007. Apologies were received from Dr Francesco Cicogna, who was making a good recovery from a heart attack suffered over Easter. The Chairman extended a welcome to the new member from Kyrgyzstan, Dr Tuygunali Abdraimov, Minister of Health, and to his adviser Mr Mukhtar Djumaliev, Ambassador of Kyrgyzstan, as well as to Dr Katalin Rapi, alternate member from Hungary.
2. In his opening remarks, the Regional Director drew attention to three issues that had been prominent since the SCRC's previous session: World Health Day (commemorated on 7 April each year), in connection with which the Regional Office had issued a publication on health security; European Immunization Week (16–22 April 2007), for which events had been organized in 20 countries of the Region; and intellectual property rights, in connection with which two consultations had been organized for the newly independent states (NIS) countries and south-east European Member States (Moscow, 26–27 April and Istanbul, 30 April – 1 May).
3. The Deputy Regional Director also referred to a recent WHO global meeting with high-level representatives of the World Bank, at which the Bank's new health systems strategy had been discussed and the respective roles of WHO and the Bank had been debated. In addition, the annual tripartite review meeting had been held between the European Commission, the Council of Europe and the WHO Regional Office for Europe.
4. The agenda and programme of the session were adopted, with the addition of the subject “Elective posts at the Sixtieth World Health Assembly” under the item “Other matters”. The report of the SCRC's fourth session was adopted without amendment.

Fifty-seventh session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

Provisional agenda and programme

5. The Regional Director reported that he had visited the Federal Parliament building in Belgrade, the site graciously made available by the Government of Serbia for the fifty-seventh session of the Regional Committee (RC57). He was convinced that, as a symbol of democracy, it would foster a spirit of mutual respect and a productive dialogue among participants.
6. The first day of the session (Monday 17 September 2007) would be mainly devoted to “setting the scene”, with the presentation of statements and reports by the Regional Director and the Chairman of the SCRC, followed by discussion of matters arising out of decisions and resolutions of the World Health Assembly and the Executive Board. At the specific request of the Member State that would hold the presidency of the European Union (EU) at the time of RC57, the Regional Director's report would cover, among other areas, the subject of migrants' health.
7. There would be extensive discussion of technical items on Monday afternoon, all of Tuesday and Wednesday morning. The Regional Committee would meet in private on Wednesday afternoon to nominate or elect members to various WHO bodies and committees, and the session would conclude with the approval of the report on Thursday morning.
8. The SCRC noted that the process of organizing the forthcoming session of the Regional Committee had been greatly helped by the fact that it had held six meetings during the year, rather than the five that had hitherto been customary, and recommended that this practice should continue.

9. It decided that the title of one of the technical briefings to be held in connection with RC57 should be changed to “Regional situation of water-related diseases and the Protocol on Water and Health” and it recommended that, so far as possible, a broad geographical range of countries should be selected as case studies for the various briefings, with less importance attached to the presentation of numerical data than to a description of how they were tackling the challenges being discussed.

10. Lastly, the SCRC agreed that the Chairman, when presenting his report, could invite Member States to suggest technical items that they would like to have taken up at future RC sessions.

Draft documents and draft resolutions, and views to be presented by SCRC members

11. The Deputy Regional Director noted that the draft documents for RC57 had been revised to take account of suggestions made by the SCRC at its previous session.

Health workforce policies

12. The draft paper now included a more detailed analysis and assessment of health workforce trends and future needs, while more emphasis was placed (both in the document and in the draft resolution) on development of an ethical framework for the international recruitment of health workers in the WHO European Region.

13. One member of the SCRC recalled that ministers of foreign affairs of seven countries (including Jonas Støre of Norway) had on 20 March 2007 adopted the Oslo Ministerial Declaration on global health,¹ one component of which addressed human resources for health. In addition, a task force on health workforce migration had been set up under the Global Health Workforce Alliance. The Regional Office was urged to keep in close touch with the many groups being formed to tackle the issues being faced in that field.

14. The SCRC also agreed that the draft resolution should be amended to include the following points:

- Member States should be urged to plan and take responsibility for the development of their own health workforce; and
- the Regional Director should be requested to develop a minimum core data set, in order to improve the quality and comparability of information.

Obesity and Food and nutrition action plan

15. As recommended by the SCRC, the focus of the draft paper had been sharpened and it had been made more action-oriented. The health goals in the proposed Second WHO European Action Plan for Food and Nutrition Policy had been reworded in “generic” terms, while the question of whether to include measurable targets would be decided at the meeting of national focal points to be held in early June 2007.

16. The SCRC suggested that the Action Plan as proposed had been following a more “classical” approach, while it should take more account of recent developments in the field, such as novel foods and the use of nanotechnology, and that it should place more emphasis on healthy ageing, to balance the proposed action area on “Supporting a healthy start”. The Standing Committee was also concerned that the Action Plan should be recognized as being forward-looking and covering the broader area of food and nutrition, whereas the other part of the agenda item, reporting on the WHO European Ministerial Conference on Obesity, presented a description of the current situation in a narrower field and should fit better under the agenda item on “Follow-up to previous sessions of the Regional Committee”.

¹ Oslo Ministerial Declaration on global health: a pressing foreign policy issue of our time. The Lancet, 369: 1373–1378 (2007)

17. The SCRC member who would present the Standing Committee's views on the item at RC57 confirmed that he would draw attention to that distinction. In addition, he would note that the Action Plan comprised a range of measures from which Member States would have to choose, depending on their specific circumstances: some might opt for a classic, intersectoral orientation, while others would need to adopt novel approaches. In addition, he would place emphasis on the ethical aspects of food and nutrition policy. He would finalize his comments after the focal points' meeting, and the SCRC would have a chance to review them (as well as those of the SCRC members due to speak on other agenda items) at its session on the eve of RC57.

Millennium Development Goals

18. The conclusions of the draft document on health systems and the health of mothers and children in the context of the MDGs had been amended to make more explicit the links with the WHO European Ministerial Conference on Health Systems, to be held in Tallinn, Estonia in June 2008. The SCRC agreed to the new draft document.

Officers of the session

19. By tradition, the Minister of Health of the host country was invited to be President of a Regional Committee session held outside Copenhagen. The Chairman of the SCRC would be nominated as Executive President of the session, while the Vice-Chair of the SCRC would be proposed as Deputy Executive President. The SCRC would be informed at its next session of the Secretariat's suggestion for the post of Rapporteur.

Place of future sessions of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe

20. The SCRC had judged it more appropriate for RC59 to be held in Copenhagen, in order to have a "neutral" location for the session at which the nomination of the Regional Director would take place. The Secretariat had accordingly approached the three countries that had offered to host RC59, to ascertain whether they would be in a position to host RC58 instead. In the light of the responses received, the SCRC agreed to recommend to the Regional Committee that it should hold its future sessions in the following locations:

2008	Georgia
2009	Copenhagen
2010	Russian Federation
2011	Copenhagen

Dates of sessions of the Fifteenth SCRC

21. The SCRC recognized that the dates of three of the six sessions planned for its 2007–2008 work year were defined in advance, in relation to the meetings of other bodies:

- the first session, due to be held in Belgrade on 20 September 2007, immediately following the closure of RC57;
- the fifth session, on the day before the opening of the Sixty-first World Health Assembly (date to be confirmed); and
- the sixth session, on 14 September 2008, the day before the opening of RC58.

22. The Chairman extended an invitation for the Fifteenth SCRC to hold its second session in London in November (dates to be confirmed).

23. It was further proposed that the Fifteenth SCRC should hold its third session in Copenhagen on 14 and 15 January 2008, and its fourth session also at the Regional Office on 18 and 19 March 2008.

Membership of WHO bodies and committees

24. With a view to reaching consensus on the candidates it would recommend to RC57, the SCRC made a more detailed review of candidatures received for membership of the Executive Board, the Standing Committee, the Joint Coordinating Board of the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases, and the European Environment and Health Committee (EEHC). So far as the latter body was concerned, the SCRC noted that five of its ten “country members” were to be designated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Committee on Environmental Policy (CEP). The CEP was due to hold its next session in Geneva on 29 May 2007; the SCRC therefore agreed tentatively to five candidates and decided to postpone its formal consideration of candidatures for membership of the EEHC until its pre-RC57 session.

Progress report of the group reviewing the SCRC’s role and way of working

25. The group had not met since the SCRC's fourth session. It would proceed to finalize its report, which would be sent to members of the SCRC by e-mail for comment. The salient points would then be incorporated in the SCRC's report to RC57; the full report would be presented to the SCRC for endorsement at its next session.

Establishment of a new geographically dispersed office

26. The Deputy Regional Director noted that Greece's proposal to establish a new geographically dispersed office or centre was designed to help strengthen the work of the Regional Office, and that the Regional Director had suggested that it should work in the area of noncommunicable diseases (NCD), including mental health, an area that had historically been underfunded and which was now a priority for the Regional Office, following the adoption of the European Strategy for NCD prevention and control. A number of broad objectives and areas of work had been identified, but they would be subject to further discussion and negotiation.

27. The Regional Director recalled that the proposed centre would be the first to be established in seven years, and he confirmed that it would meet the criteria for its establishment and would comply fully with all WHO's rules governing such entities. The funding offered (€2 million per annum for ten years) was for technical activities, in addition to the provision of premises, and it would be difficult to secure such a long-term commitment of funds in any other way.

28. The SCRC believed that, while a geographically dispersed office or centre might be a valuable instrument to make available to the Organization, the Secretariat should consider carefully in which field to apply it and how to make it part of a long-term strategy. If NCD were a priority, it was essential for the Regional Office to address that area properly, as part of its core business. The Standing Committee was therefore keen to receive an assurance from the Secretariat that the proposed centre would fit into the Regional Office's corporate strategy.

29. In addition, the SCRC was concerned about the implications of WHO receiving considerable resources in the form of tied donations, rather than being able itself to decide on their use. The SCRC also questioned whether the infrastructure of the Regional Office in Copenhagen would be required to support the proposed operations in Greece.

30. In reply the Director, Administration and Finance confirmed that the proposed level of funding for the centre met two of the criteria endorsed by the Regional Committee in resolution EUR/RC54/R6, namely that it would have a minimum critical mass of professional staff and a funding commitment for at least five years. In addition, the agreement with the host country would be a standardized one, and the proposed centre would use the same planning, financial and administrative tools as the rest of the Organization.

31. The Deputy Regional Director reiterated that the intention was to look at all the fields within the broad domain of NCD and identify those that were in need of additional support within the framework of the draft Medium-term strategic plan. In general, the Regional Office was keen to increase its capacity to support high-priority areas of work.

32. In conclusion, the SCRC was confident that the Regional Director would do what was needed to make sure that the proposed centre worked well as an integral part of a structure of the Regional Office. It agreed that the Regional Director and the Secretariat should continue to discuss with the Greek Ministry of Health and Social Affairs how best to constitute the proposed centre, and that the Chairman should be kept informed of developments. It looked forward to receiving a more detailed document in the near future, for discussion during RC57.

Sixtieth World Health Assembly (WHA60)

Review of provisional agenda

33. The Regional Director informed the SCRC that the provisional agenda of WHA60 contained a large number of technical and health items, in addition to the Organization's Medium-Term Strategic Programme 2008–2013 and Proposed Programme Budget 2008–2009. Further details would be given at the meeting with representatives of European Member States, to be held just after the closure of the SCRC's current session.

Elective posts

34. The SCRC was informed that the Regional Office had submitted to the WHO headquarters Secretariat proposals for the posts of Vice-President of the Assembly and Chairman of Committee B, as well as for membership of the General Committee, the Committee on Credentials and the Committee on Nominations.