

## **SECOND MEETING OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS (2005) DURING THE COVID-19 RESPONSE**

**7 October 2020, Geneva, Switzerland**

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### **Report of the Second Meeting of the Review Committee on the Functioning of the International Health Regulations (2005) During the COVID-19 Response**

#### **Opening**

The second open meeting of the Review Committee took place on Tuesday 7 October 2020. The meeting was opened at 14:10 with remarks from the Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. The meeting was attended by 60 representatives of WHO Member States, and 20 from United Nations agencies and non-state actors in official relations with WHO, in addition to the members of the Review Committee. Dr Tedros welcomed Member States and others to the meeting, noting that international cooperation is the only way to respond to the pandemic of COVID-19. So far, seven Member States have made submissions to the Committee and the Director-General urged others to do so.

#### **Presentations to the open meeting**

The Chair of the Review Committee, Dr Lothar Wieler, updated participants on the current activities of the Committee. It was noted that the Committee had set up three sub-groups to review issues relating to preparedness, alert and response. The Chair pointed out that the Committee was still at the stage of prioritizing topics and therefore could not share any findings. The Chair also informed of a meeting with the Chair of Independent Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (IOAC), and the advisors of the Co-Chairs of the Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (IPPPR). The IHR Review Committee meets weekly, with open meetings such as the present one once a month.

The leads of the three subgroups then gave brief updates. Dr Jean-Marie Okwo-Bele, lead of the subgroup on preparedness, pointed out that preliminary questions from the subgroup included whether the IHR assessment is sufficiently dynamic, what a preparedness checklist would contain, whether countries had the local capacities to implement the IHR core capacities, and whether countries are able to take a whole-of-government approach in an emergency. The subgroup will also look at generic preparedness planning for pandemic events and will review the support to Member States given by WHO and its partners.

Dr Mark Salter, lead of the subgroup on alert, pointed to three main elements of interest for the subgroup, namely the notification and verification processes, risk assessment and information-sharing, and procedures for convening the Emergency Committee, declaration of a public health emergency of international concern, and the need for an intermediate level of alert.

Dr James LeDuc, lead of the response subgroup, pointed to the areas of review of this group, which included travel and trade measures, international coordination and collaboration, and communication and information sharing.

### **Questions and discussion**

Member State asked several questions:

- whether Member States would be able to comment on the Committee's draft report;
- whether the committee would invite a speaker from a Member State to share experience with regard to cruise ships during the pandemic;
- rapid sharing of information (including genomic information) and rapid diagnostic tests;
- infodemic management;
- comments on the pandemic and the PHEIC declaration;
- access to COVID-19 ACT Accelerator tools;
- travel and trade measures and various aspects of travel and points of entry capacities during COVID-19, including collaboration with International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), as well as with other partners, such as the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

In his answers to questions, the Chair recalled the fact that the Committee is fully independent and will make the recommendations it believes are necessary, though the experience of earlier review committees is also very important.

Subgroup leads said that the binary nature of the PHEIC was a clear concern, but there would also need to be consideration of what the impact of an intermediate stage would be and whether there could be regional PHEICs. The response subgroup would also be looking at the usefulness or not of travel restrictions.

In response to the question on the process for potential revisions/amendments of the IHR, the Principle Legal Officer for International, Constitutional and global Health Law reiterated that Article 50 of the IHR makes clear that the functions of the Review Committee include making recommendations regarding amendments to the Regulations. He said that amending the IHR should not be understood as necessarily re-opening the entire instrument, and that, in fact the IHR were amended in 2014 in relation to Annex 7 on the validity for life of the yellow fever vaccination certificate, through Resolution WHA67.13, and the amendment entered into force in July 2016.

The representative of the International Organization for Migration commented on the public health concerns for migrants in the context of the pandemic. Representative of UNAIDS asked about incentives and enforcement in relation to travel and trade and what might be foreseen in terms of digital implementation of the IHR.

One non-state actor raised the issue of early reporting on outbreaks before formal notification by States parties, and whether local communities could play a role in this. It also expressed concern that some countries have used the pandemic to suppress the exercise of human rights and asked whether the Review Committee would address the lack of compliance with obligations under the IHR.

The Secretariat responded that WHO has in place a mechanism for collecting and receiving information from a variety of sources, not just from the National IHR Focal points, and this is

also addressed in the IHR Article 8. WHO then requests verification of this information to the country concerned, in accordance with IHR provisions.

Member States were thanked for their input, and those that had not yet made submissions to the Committee were urged to do so.

The Chair closed the meeting at 14:00 CET.