



**MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT OF THE ARGENTINE REPUBLIC
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORKING GROUP ON STREAMLINING THE
GOVERNANCE MECHANISMS OF PAHO**

PROCESS FOR ELECTING THE DIRECTOR OF PAHO

At the last meeting of the Executive Committee's Working Group on Streamlining the Governance Mechanisms of PAHO, the Group's Chair proposed that, given the diversity of opinions, the Members of the Working Group and observers submit concrete observations to ensure that the different positions would be more clearly understood.

The Ministry of Health and Environment of the Argentine Republic is pleased to see any initiative aimed at improving governance mechanisms to increase transparency and accountability, and is therefore actively participating in the Working Group on PAHO in the 21st Century and the Working Group on Streamlining the Governance Mechanisms of PAHO.

Argentina's position on the **Process for Electing the Director of PAHO** is detailed below.

With respect to the **Process for Electing the Director of PAHO** [sic], Argentina:

- a) Considers it appropriate for the Executive Committee to define the procedure and explicit criteria for the presentation of candidates and their selection.
- b) Views positively the idea of creating an **Open Forum** in the Executive Committee for candidates to describe their platforms. The creation of an Open Forum of this nature provides a medium for airing the views of the candidates, putting public health matters, as well as their proposals to improve the Organization, at the fore. It also seems appropriate to establish the rules of the game for this FORUM, as well as the deadline for nominations, their format, etc.
- c) Considers Canada's proposal of four months (16 weeks) prior to the Pan American Sanitary Conference to be an appropriate **deadline for the nomination of candidates**.
- d) Considers three (3) months of **Paid Leave for Internal Candidates** prior to the election a suitable period that would guarantee the proper functioning of the Organization. Any longer might prove too onerous for the Organization and impede the efficiency and effectiveness of its operations.
- e) Notes, regarding the item **Freeze on Discretionary Funds**, that the Ministry of Health and Environment of the Argentine Republic takes the view that all

funds that the Director can mobilize should be in the respective BPB. To mobilize funds obtained as a result of contingencies, such as climatic catastrophes for example, the funds should be in that Program. In the case of TCC, the funds come from the budgets agreed on **with** the countries. Therefore, in order to take a position, it is necessary to request further information from the Secretariat about the existence of these discretionary funds, as indicated at the last meeting of the Working Group.

- f) Regarding the **Secret Ballot**, Argentina's view is that democracy has become a universal standard and that the principles of free and fair elections are thus a universal objective. Therefore, the secret ballot reflects a democratic attitude that must be respected and defended.

In international organizations, it considers that democratic legitimacy is protected by three basic principles:

- √ The electoral process should correspond exclusively to the Member States.
- √ Candidates should compete on an equal footing
- √ Voting should be universal and secret.

Concerning this last principle, which is the one that today has been called into question for the election of the Organization's Director, we should recall that the international organizations have been some of the international community's most important actors in promoting the spread of democracy through free and fair elections and the secret ballot. This has not been by chance, but rather, stems from the recognition that only by maintaining practices consistent with this principle can the following be guaranteed:

- √ Freedom of the electors and, as a result, greater transparency (coercion is more difficult).
- √ Trust/governance (validation of the election results lends legitimacy to the exercise of functions).

For this reason, the secret ballot is an explicit part of the electoral process in the other WHO Regional Offices (Regional Committee for Africa, Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, Regional Committee for Southeast Asia), and it rules in WHO itself for the election of the Director-General.

To revisit this debate in our Organization at the present time seems to contradict positions on which a consensus has already been reached.

Accordingly, to understand the implications of a procedural change of this nature, two issues must be taken into account:

- i) First, defense of the rule of democratic principles: changes that promote practices that violate the spirit of the times cannot be introduced. No electoral reform can obviate one of the fundamental principles of democratic electoral processes; the secret ballot has become the guardian of freedom and transparency and, hence, the cornerstone of the legitimacy of mandates. Principles are constitutive underpinnings and cannot be violated or treated as simply as slogans that vary with the context and the occasion.
- ii) Second, and no less important, is the validity of the Organization's decisions: lack of coherence and continuity threaten this quality, so valued for the exercise of any mandate. Principles are not relative, because if they were, they would be temporary and subject to endless discussion. Therefore, what force would decisions have and what need would there be for compliance with them?
- g) Drafting **job descriptions for senior posts** seems a proposal that should follow the same path as the one in the item on the Process for Electing the Director. The idea is to establish the desired candidate profile and desired levels of performance for the posts of Deputy Director, Assistant Director, and Director of Administration. The reason for establishing these profiles is to offer the Director support, to serve as a guide, rather than interfere in his/her decisions.
- h) Regarding Mexico's proposal to **introduce some controls in human resources policy**, these matters should be part of a Code of Ethics for the Organization.
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