

MEMO FOR CABINET
by the
MINISTER OF HEALTH

Amendment to the W.H.O. Constitution

On the 21st May, 1968 the World Health Assembly met in Geneva to discuss, among other items, two major amendments to the World Health Organisation Constitution. The sponsors for these amendments are Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Mexico, New Zealand, Nigeria, Panama, the Phillipines, Great Britain and the United States of America.

In essence, these amendments are to the effect that:-

- a) The World Health Assembly should henceforth operate on a biennial system in lieu of the existing annual system.
- b) that the Executive Board be composed of members representing governments and not in their private capacity.

A two-thirds majority is required for the approval of these two amendments.

The following considerations were put forward in support of amendment (a) :-

1. The U.N. Committee of Experts to examine Finances had recommended that Specialised Agencies should adopt a biennial budget cycle. This was unanimously approved by the U.N. and was welcomed by the Health Assembly.
2. Some of the other U.N. specialised Agencies operate on a biennial system.
3. Planning would be on a long-term basis.
4. The time saved on the preparation of budgets would be utilised by the Secretariat for more profitable work.
5. A system of biennial Health Assemblies would substantially reduce the conference costs included in the Assessed budget as well as the cost incurred by Member Governments for their own delegations' participation in the Health Assembly.

The reasons brought forward in support of amendment (b) are the follows:-

1. Most questions considered by the Executive Board are of direct and primary concern to governments because they involve budgetary, administrative and political issues. Of particular importance is the Board's responsibility for reviewing the programme and budget proposed by the Director General.

2. All other major Specialised Agencies' Executive boards or governing councils with responsibilities comparable to those of the W.H.O. Executive Board are composed of Government representatives. This amendment if adopted would therefore, correct an anomaly in the U.N. system by bringing W.H.O. in line with other major specialised agencies.
3. The Executive Board is responsible between Health Assemblies for important functions, which would increase significantly under a biennial system conference and budget cycle. This makes it even more essential that the Board be composed of Government representatives. However it is assumed that Governments will instruct Board members on issues of budget, coordination and policy only and will leave members free to continue to speak as individuals on purely medical matters. In this connection, it will be noted that the proposed changes in the character of the Board would not affect the present provisions of the W.H.O. Constitution which require that Board members be technically qualified in the field of health.

Hon. Ministers are requested to agree that Malta votes in favour of the proposed amendments at the Twenty-first World Health Assembly which is due to be held in Boston next July.

MH 1121/66

28th March, 1969.