



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

Committee Guide

By ChaCha Chen

Introduction

Welcome to the World Health Assembly! The World Health Assembly is the supreme governing body of the World Health Organization (WHO). To uphold the WHO's mission of "attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health," the World Health Assembly convenes once a year primarily to determine the policies of the Organization. At the annual meeting, the Assembly also reviews proposed programs and determines budgets for proposed WHO initiatives. Two-person delegations from around the world come together to debate issues and draft resolutions with the intention of improving the health status of the world's population. At this year's conference, delegates will focus on genetically modified organisms as well as water and sanitation and their role in neglected diseases, with the aim of facilitating debate and crafting detailed resolutions that address the complexities of both issues.

History and Background

The WHO, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, is comprised of 193 nations, which are divided into six geographic regions: Southeast Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean, the Americas, Africa, the Western Pacific, and Europe. Member nations appoint delegates to attend the annual Assembly.

The idea for a global health organization was first proposed in 1945 at the United Nations Conference on International Organization. After several years of discussion, the United Nations approved the WHO's charter on April 7, 1948. The organization first targeted the worldwide infectious disease epidemics of smallpox, the plague, yellow fever, cholera, and malaria. The World Health Organization also expanded immunizations for diseases such as measles, diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, tuberculosis, and polio. In 1967, the WHO began a global campaign to eliminate smallpox through mass vaccination programs. By 1979, the WHO reported that smallpox had been eradicated worldwide. Since the 1980s, the WHO has launched programs to eradicate polio and leprosy. The 1980s also marked the beginning of the organization's fight against acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS).

Recent WHO developments have included a rapid worldwide response to contain the spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), as well as dedication to achieving many of the UN's Millennium Development Goals. These goals include: reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, reducing malaria and other diseases, and developing a global partnership for development.

At the Conference

Committee Structure

Students will be placed into delegations to represent a member nation of the World

Health Organization. Delegates will work with other members in the committee as well as members of the non-governmental organizations that will be present at the conference, like Oxfam and the Red Cross. Delegates will also work with students in other committees that also represent their nation to help present a unified message for their nation. It is expected that each delegate prepare individually before the conference and that all members of the committee participate equally at the conference.

Working Toward a Resolution

Committee debate will begin with each delegate presenting the views of the country that he/she is representing at the conference, for it is critical that the views of each nation be voiced. Discussion of each topic will begin with an overview of problems, followed by specific debate on more specific aspects of the issue. As delegates debate the topic and further understand its complexities, they will draft resolutions, with the aim of creating a potential solution to the problem at hand.

Effective resolutions should be comprehensive, providing solutions in two parts: first, by outlining WHO position on each issue, and second, by providing comprehensive logistical details about what actions will be necessary to achieve solutions. As the World Health Organization essentially has no enforcement power, it is important to note that the resolutions it produces will serve as recommendations rather than requirements. However, as the WHO is a respected international body that substantiates its resolutions with extensive research, the suggested policies it presents will hardly be ignored by its audience.

As resolutions require at least a majority of the committee's approval in order to pass, it is imperative that delegations compromise and work together in order to secure enough support. While delegations should certainly always bear in mind the needs and preferences of the nation they are representing, it is also critical to recognize the importance of consensus-building, for without support from numerous nations, a resolution will surely fail. Furthermore, since this assembly is an international organization with the ultimate goal of securing global health, it is also important to consider the interests of humanity and what is best for the world, rather than just national interests. That said, national interests can and should play a role in any arguments posed by delegates.

Preparing for the Conference

It is imperative that you research prior to the conference in order to ensure that you have the knowledge necessary to engage in thoughtful debate of the issues. Your research should focus not only on the topics at hand but also on your nation's position on the issues. This preparation should help you understand why these topics exist, why they are controversial, how your nation fits into or opposes other nation's positions, and why your nation's opinion matters.

Do not expect to find easy answers to these problems while researching, and do not be disappointed if you do not readily discover a solution. If these issues could be resolved after a few hours of web research, they would not be such difficult global problems! We have purposely selected complicated issues that stump diplomats, health policy analysts, politicians, and activists, whose careers are dedicated to solving them. Answers will likely emerge after long hours of thoughtful and creative discussion in committee, during which the background information you have gathered will prove immensely helpful.

Conclusion

With a sound understanding of the topics, dedication to advancing world health, and a willingness to speak out to defend your nation's opinion, you, as delegates of the World Health Assembly, have the ability to solve problems that have burdened the world for years. If you have any questions or need help in order to accomplish this, please contact your chair, Guy Edouard, at gedouard@fas.harvard.edu.