



Pan American
Health
Organization



World Health
Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
Americas

SPECIAL SESSION OF THE DIRECTING COUNCIL
SPECIAL SESSION OF THE REGIONAL COMMITTEE OF WHO FOR THE AMERICAS

Virtual Session, 10 December 2020

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FINAL REPORT

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FINAL REPORT

Opening of the Session

1. A special session of the Directing Council of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), Regional Committee of the World Health Organization (WHO) for the Americas, was held on 10 December 2020. Owing to the extraordinary and unprecedented circumstances presented by the COVID-19 pandemic, the session was held online using a virtual meeting platform.
2. Dr. Fernando Ruiz Gómez (Colombia, President of the Directing Council) opened the session and welcomed the participants, noting that the session had been convened to discuss various issues relating to access to COVID-19 vaccines.
3. The Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB or Bureau), Dr. Carissa Etienne, welcoming the participants, affirmed that the aim of the session was to update Member States on the status of the pandemic in the Region of the Americas and seek their guidance on the efforts of the Bureau to secure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for the countries and territories of the Region. She described some of the technical cooperation activities that the Bureau had carried out to support Member States in grappling with the pandemic and outlined some of the steps being taken to help countries prepare for the introduction of the vaccine and address potential logistical issues relating to cold chain and other matters.
4. Noting that PAHO was coordinating with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to prepare the procurement strategy for the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Facility, the Director explained that the Bureau anticipated that some vaccine suppliers would offer a single price to all countries participating in the COVAX Facility, while others would offer differentiated, or tiered, pricing schemes. The Bureau also expected that vaccine supplies would be severely constrained throughout 2021. Against that background, the Bureau considered that extraordinary negotiations might be needed to ensure that the Region had equitable and timely access to vaccines at the best possible price. The Bureau was therefore seeking Member States' authorization to adjust some of the terms and conditions of the Revolving Fund for Access to Vaccines (the Revolving Fund) in order to address the special circumstances surrounding the procurement of COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX Facility.
5. Dr. Etienne stressed that the Bureau remained committed to the principles of the Revolving Fund. Recalling that the countries of the Region of the Americas had shown unwavering support for the Revolving Fund and for the adoption of new vaccines, she expressed confidence that Member States would continue to demonstrate solidarity and make the best decisions so that COVID-19 vaccines were available for every country and territory in the Americas, ensuring that none was left out or left behind.

Procedural Matters

Election of Officers

6. The officers elected during the 58th Directing Council continued to serve in their respective capacities during the Special Session:

<i>President:</i>	Colombia	(Dr. Fernando Ruiz Gómez)
<i>Vice President:</i>	Grenada	(Hon. Nickolas Steele)
<i>Vice President:</i>	Honduras	(Hon. Alba Consuelo Flores Ferrufino)
<i>Rapporteur:</i>	Uruguay	(Dr. Miguel Asqueta Sónora)

7. The Director of PASB, Dr. Carissa Etienne, served as Secretary ex officio, and the Deputy Director, Ms. Mary Lou Valdez, served as Technical Secretary.

Report on Credentials

8. The President announced that, following the special procedures established for the virtual session of the 58th Directing Council, and in accordance with the information sent to Member States with the notice of convocation for the Special Session, the credentials submitted by Member States, Participating States, and Associate Members at the 58th Directing Council would be considered valid for the Special Session. In his capacity as President, he had assessed any new or revised credentials received by the Bureau before the opening of the Special Session to determine whether they were in conformity with the requirements of the Rules of Procedure of the Directing Council.

9. The Directing Council approved the report on credentials (Decision CDSS1[D1]).

Adoption of the Agenda (Document CDSS1/1)

10. The Directing Council adopted the agenda proposed by the Director (Document CDSS1/1) without change (Decision CDSS1[D2]).

Program Policy Matters

Update on the COVID 19 Pandemic in the Region of the Americas, COVAX Preparedness, and Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccines (Document CDSS1/2)

11. Dr. Ciro Ugarte (Director, Department of Health Emergencies, PASB) presented an update on the COVID-19 situation in the Region, noting that, while there had been a decline in cases and deaths in some countries in August and September 2020, in the subsequent months there had been a significant rise in both cases and deaths. The Region remained at the epicenter of the pandemic and continued to account for the highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the world.

12. Dr. Ugarte then highlighted some aspects of the Organization's response to the pandemic, including the preparation of more than 110 technical guidelines and recommendations; more than 220 trainings on testing, tracking, care, and other topics; and the supply of millions of gloves, masks, and other personal protective equipment. He also drew attention to some of the advances that Member States had achieved, noting, for example, that all 35 Member States had a functioning multisectoral, multi-partner coordination mechanism for COVID-19, in-country capacity or access to an international laboratory, and a clinical referral system to provide care for patients with COVID-19. In addition, a number of countries had dramatically increased the capacity of their intensive care units.

13. Nevertheless, Dr. Ugarte pointed out a number of challenges remained, in particular with regard to surveillance and laboratory capacity, international travel and transport, points of entry, infection prevention and control practices, case management, operational support and logistics, and reorganization of health services to deliver optimized care for all patients. Another major challenge was the need for guidance on public health and travel-related measures. In response to that need, PAHO had developed and published a set of guidelines on resuming non-essential international travel in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and on the use of COVID-19-related testing. Concluding his presentation, Dr. Ugarte noted that all of the above-mentioned challenges were expected to continue over the coming months, but expressed confidence that, working together with the Bureau, the countries of the Region would succeed in surmounting them.

14. Dr. Jarbas Barbosa (Assistant Director, PASB) then described the measures being implemented to support countries in the rollout of COVID-19 vaccines and explained the rationale for the proposed resolution put forward in Document CDSS1/2. He reported that the Bureau was working with Member States to address various regulatory aspects of vaccine rollout; immunization policies and vaccine delivery strategies; vaccine supply, logistics, and cold chain; community engagement, communication, and demand; and advocacy and resource mobilization.

15. Dr. Barbosa then provided an update on the milestones and the activities undertaken in the framework of the COVAX Facility, noting that the 27 self-financing countries and territories in the Region had signed commitment agreements by 18 September 2020. He also noted that Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and PAHO had held a joint briefing on 23 October with the 10 countries in the Region eligible for Advance Market Commitment (AMC) support. The PAHO/UNICEF joint tender process for vaccine procurement had been launched in November 2020, and a joint request for proposals had been issued on 12 November. Dr. Barbosa indicated that the COVAX Facility aimed to deliver 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2021, but that the bulk (86%) of those doses were not expected to be ready for delivery until the second half of the year.

16. The weighted average cost per dose of vaccine was estimated at US\$ 10.55.¹ The Bureau had carried out various cost simulation exercises and had found in all cases that

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all monetary figures in this report are expressed in United States dollars.

covering only 20% of the population would increase countries' total immunization budgets by at least twofold and covering the entire population would entail a twelvefold increase. The Bureau was working with the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank, the European Union, and other donors to mobilize resources for loans to support countries in procuring vaccines and related supplies, including syringes. A portfolio of vaccines would be presented under the COVAX Facility, with vaccine prices varying within the portfolio.

17. Turning to the proposed resolution, Dr. Barbosa explained that under the COVAX Facility, UNICEF and the PAHO Revolving Fund would be the procurement mechanism. The PAHO Revolving Fund would procure vaccines not only for Latin America and the Caribbean but also for high-income countries. While some vaccine suppliers were expected to offer a single price for all COVAX participants—which would comply with the Revolving Fund's lowest-price clause—others would offer tiered prices based on countries' level of income. As vaccine supplies were expected to be severely constrained, with irregular and unpredictable availability during 2021, the Bureau believed that, in order to secure an adequate supply of COVID-19 vaccines for the Region, flexibility was needed to allow for negotiations with suppliers offering tiered pricing. The Bureau was therefore seeking authorization from Member States to adjust the terms and conditions of the Revolving Fund, for this occasion only, to address the special circumstances created by the COVAX Facility.

18. In the Directing Council's discussion of the matter, delegates expressed thanks to the Bureau for its efforts to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines at affordable prices for the countries and territories of the Region and for its support in helping Member States to prepare for the introduction of vaccines. While that support was seen as critical, it was also emphasized that all Member States needed to put in place a robust strategy for prioritizing access to vaccines at the national level, starting with older persons, frontline health workers and other essential workers, and indigenous and other especially vulnerable populations. It was pointed out that, since the COVAX Facility would only make it possible to provide about 20% of the vaccines needed by countries in 2021, it would be important to look for ways of securing additional supplies as quickly as possible in order to cover the entire population.

19. Most delegates supported the proposed resolution and were in favor of allowing for the possibility of negotiations with suppliers offering tiered pricing, while stressing the need to ensure fair and affordable vaccine prices. One delegate, however, said that her Government was not in agreement with the proposal to adjust the terms and conditions of the Revolving Fund in order to accept the possibility of tiered pricing, which might create a dangerous precedent for the future of the Revolving Fund. She proposed that the resolution should be amended to request the Director to negotiate for single prices for countries participating in the Revolving Fund. Another delegate proposed that the resolution should be amended to request the Director commit to preserving the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to placing access to vaccines over and above commercial and economic interests. A third delegate sought clarification regarding the effect of the proposed resolution on the agreements that countries had already signed with the COVAX Facility.

20. Several additional amendments were proposed. It was pointed out, for example, that the Bureau might continue to require flexibility in the future, given the uncertainties around the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine, and it was therefore proposed that the words “for this occasion only” should be deleted. At the same time, it was considered important to make it clear that any adjustments to the terms and conditions of the Revolving Fund would be an exception, and it was suggested that “for this occasion only” should be replaced by “exceptionally.”

21. It was also pointed out that a number of countries in the Region were dealing with large migrant populations, which would increase their need for vaccines, and it was proposed that the need should be recognized in the resolution and that the Bureau should be asked to advocate with international partners to consider allocating a percentage of COVID-19 vaccines to be supplied to the migrant population. While expressing support for efforts to ensure equitable access to vaccines, a delegate noted the need not to undermine incentives for innovation and proposed that language acknowledging that need should be added to the resolution. Another delegate proposed that the resolution should include mention of the need to combat vaccine hesitancy.

22. Several delegates considered that the proposed amendments should be limited to those relating specifically to the issue of flexibility in vaccine price negotiations, which was the focus of the proposed resolution. With regard specifically to the amendment relating to commercial and economic interests, one delegate pointed out that negotiating the best vaccine prices was an inherently commercial and economic undertaking. Another delegate noted that the proposed amendments concerning migrant populations would introduce a policy dimension into an eminently practical resolution that was intended to address a particular issue related to price negotiations. He also pointed out that a broader resolution covering numerous matters related to COVID-19 and the response to the pandemic had been adopted during the recently concluded 58th Directing Council.²

23. Dr. Ugarte, responding to the comments made, commended countries’ efforts to deal with the tremendous public health challenges posed by COVID-19 and stressed that the Organization would have to work collectively for many months to come in order to bring the pandemic to an end.

24. Dr. Barbosa explained that the proposed resolution would have no effect on the agreements that countries had already signed with the COVAX Facility. It would simply ensure that PAHO could negotiate effectively, together with UNICEF, to secure supplies of the vaccine for the Region. He agreed on the importance of ensuring the most affordable prices for all countries, but pointed out that Gavi had already approved tiered pricing schemes as well as a single price and that the countries that had signed commitment agreements with the COVAX Facility had therefore also agreed to tiered pricing. He also pointed out that requiring the Bureau to accept only offers of a single price would limit its ability to participate in the COVAX bidding process, as it would be precluded from considering any tiered pricing offers and consequently might have to withdraw from the

² Resolution CD58.R9 (2020).

negotiations altogether. As a result, countries would be obliged to rely on UNICEF for vaccine procurement and distribution, but, unlike the PAHO Revolving Fund, UNICEF had no experience in distributing vaccines in the Americas. He assured Member States that the Bureau would make every effort to obtain the best price for the countries of the Americas, but stressed that it needed the flexibility to consider all offers, in accordance with the agreements already signed by the 27 self-financing countries in the Region.

25. The Director, echoing Dr. Barbosa's comments, affirmed that the Bureau would strive to obtain the best possible price, as it had always done during the more than 40 years that it had been procuring vaccines for Member States through the Revolving Fund. She appealed to Member States to accord the Bureau the flexibility that it needed in the current exceptional circumstances to negotiate on their behalf in order to secure timely access to safe and efficacious vaccines. She assured Member States that the Bureau was already looking ahead and considering how to ensure access to vaccines for 100% of the Region's population and that it was also working to combat vaccine hesitancy and ensure good vaccine uptake.

26. The Directing Council adopted the amended resolution (Resolution CDSS1.R1), authorizing the Director to negotiate to attain access to COVID-19 vaccines at the best possible price and, if necessary and exceptionally, adjust the terms and conditions of the Revolving Fund in order to secure the supply of COVID-19 vaccines for countries participating in the Fund.

Closure of the Session

27. Following the customary exchange of courtesies, the President declared the Special Session of the Directing Council closed.

Resolutions and Decisions

28. The following are the resolutions and decisions adopted by the Special Session of the Directing Council:

Resolutions

CDSS1.R1 Update on the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Region of the Americas, COVAX Preparedness, and Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccines

THE SPECIAL SESSION OF THE DIRECTING COUNCIL,

Having reviewed the *Update on the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Region of the Americas, COVAX Preparedness, and Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccines* (Document CDSS1/2);

Considering the global crisis induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of timely, equitable, and affordable access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines of demonstrated quality;

Recognizing the critical role of the overall technical cooperation package of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to support country readiness for successfully introducing COVID-19 vaccines;

Acknowledging the efforts by the Pan American Sanitary Bureau (PASB or the Bureau) to partner with the COVAX Facility and to facilitate the participation of PAHO Member States in the Facility;

Reaffirming the principles, terms and conditions, and procedures of the PAHO Revolving Fund for Access to Vaccines (the Revolving Fund) and its benefit for public health in the Region of the Americas (Resolution CD52.R5 [2013]) and the Revolving Fund's role as one of the mechanisms within the COVAX Facility for PAHO Member States to secure COVID-19 vaccines;

Taking into account that there could be severe supply constraints for COVID-19 vaccines;

Noting that 27 self-financing countries and territories in the Region of the Americas have signed commitment agreements directly with Gavi to participate in the COVAX Facility and that 10 countries will apply to participate in the COVAX Facility Advanced Market Commitment;

Recognizing that the Bureau requires the approval of the Member States of PAHO in order to conduct any special negotiations that may be needed under these unique global circumstances,

RESOLVES:

1. To urge Member States to:
 - a) advance with national preparatory plans to introduce COVID-19 vaccines;
 - b) recognize the Bureau and the Revolving Fund as the Pan American technical cooperation mechanism most suitable for providing equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines throughout the Region;
 - c) actively participate in the COVAX Facility and advocate for solidarity, affordable pricing, equitable allocation, and sustainable access principles, without undermining incentives for innovation.
2. To request the Director to:
 - a) continue to support Member States in preparing for the introduction of COVID-19 vaccines, with the commitment to preserve the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health;

- b) maintain coordination with international partners and advocate with them to leverage existing capacities and economies of scale through joint pooled procurement in an effort to secure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for the population, including migrant populations, at a low flat price for PAHO Member States participating in the Revolving Fund;
- c) negotiate to attain for those Member States participating in the Revolving Fund access to COVID-19 vaccines at the best possible price and, if necessary and exceptionally, adjust the terms and conditions of the Revolving Fund in order to address the special circumstances to secure the supply of COVID-19 vaccines;
- d) report in 2021 to the 59th Directing Council on the Bureau's efforts to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.

(Single Plenary, 10 December 2020)

Decisions

Decision CDSS1(D1): Report on Credentials

The Directing Council approved the report on credentials as presented on 10 December 2020.

(Single Plenary, 10 December 2020)

Decision CDSS1(D2): Adoption of the Agenda

Pursuant to Rule 10 of the Rules of Procedure of the Directing Council, the Council adopted the agenda submitted by the Director (Document CDSS1/1).

(Single Plenary, 10 December 2020)

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the President of the Special Session of the Directing Council, Delegate of Colombia, and the Secretary ex officio, Director of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau, sign the present Final Report in the Spanish language.

DONE in Washington, D.C., on this tenth day of December in the year two thousand twenty. The Secretary shall deposit the original texts in the archives of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau. The Final Report will be published on the website of the Pan American Health Organization once approved by the President.

Fernando Ruiz Gómez
President of the
Special Session of the Directing Council,
Special Session of the Regional Committee
of WHO for the Americas
Delegate of Colombia

Carissa Etienne
Secretary ex officio of the
Special Session of the Directing Council,
Special Session of the Regional Committee
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Director of the
Pan American Sanitary Bureau

AGENDA

1. OPENING OF THE SESSION

2. PROCEDURAL MATTERS

2.1 Adoption of the Agenda
(Rule 10, Rules of Procedure)

3. PROGRAM POLICY MATTERS

3.1 Update on the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Region of the Americas, COVAX Preparedness, and Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccine

4. OTHER MATTER

5. CLOSURE OF THE SESSION

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Working Documents

CDSS1/1	Agenda
CDSS1/2	Update on the COVID-19 Pandemic in the Region of the Americas, COVAX Preparedness, and Equitable Access to COVID-19 Vaccine

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