Preparations for the UN Secretary General’s report to the 64th General Assembly

Agenda item: Global Health and Foreign Policy

WHO

The resolution

General Assembly resolution 66/33, in operative paragraph 5, requests the “UN Secretary General (UNSG), in close collaboration with the Director–General of the World Health Organization, and in consultation with Member States, submit to the General Assembly during its sixty-fourth session in 2009 a comprehensive report, with recommendations, on challenges, activities and initiatives related to foreign policy and global health.”

The task

WHO, in close coordination with the office of the UNSG, and in consultation with Member States, has been tasked to take the lead in preparing this report. The core group of seven member countries of the “Foreign Policy and Global Health initiative (FPGH)” that initiated the resolution has offered to assist WHO in facilitating Member State consultations and inputs into the report.

The report will analyze the rise of global health issues in foreign policy, examine key challenges facing global health as a foreign policy objective, describe initiatives and activities that attempt to improve how foreign policy processes incorporate and advance global health concerns, and will make recommendations for strengthening global health as a strategic foreign policy interest of UN Member States.

Background and linkages to upcoming events with a global health focus

The General Assembly resolution 63/33 was cosponsored by 50 countries. The overall intention in negotiating the resolution was to establish the link between global health and foreign policy across the multilateral settings in New York, Geneva and elsewhere where these issues are negotiated, including in processes within the UN system, other intergovernmental settings, regional and bilateral relations, and partnerships with non-State actors. Another intent was to increase UN Member States’ awareness of the health implications of foreign policy in order to ensure that foreign policy decisions enable, protect and promote public health and improve health outcomes.

A series of upcoming meetings hosted by the UN and other associated events and processes have the potential to provide opportunities for side-consultations and to derive input on the contents of the report. These meetings can be grouped along two main tracks, and to note that details of some of the meetings will continue to evolve:

1. The financial crisis and its impact
   - A number of high level meetings on the impact of the financial crisis provide important opportunities to make the case for protecting social investment, and in particular ensuring access to essential life saving services for the most vulnerable groups. Meetings and consultations with specific focus on health impact of the crisis are being scheduled to take place globally and regionally, with the potential to build the case for protecting and optimising health investments;
   - The High Level Task Force on Innovative International Financing for Health Systems will meet and present its recommendations in June 2009;
• Meetings of governing bodies of UN special agencies, funds and programmes and global initiatives/financing instruments such as GAVI, GFATM and UNITAID will address the impact of the financial crisis on programming, strategies and priorities.

2. Accelerating health outcomes through a more coherent agenda, better linkages with development and international policies in support of public health

- The ECOSOC Annual Ministerial Review (AMR) meeting in Geneva (July) and the regional and preparatory meetings leading up to the AMR, with focus on opportunities to accelerate health outcomes by addressing synergies across all the Millennium Development Goals and opportunities through enabling policies for social equity, development and health security.

- The Offices of the UNSG and President of the General Assembly invitation to a June 15th High Level Event/Thematic Debate on “unfinished business” in the health sector agenda – with focus on health systems (including health workers and better data to inform and track policy), maternal mortality and neglected tropical diseases. This meeting is also anticipated to discuss broader and more effective partnerships for health, including “beyond intergovernmental structures and processes” (such as illustrated by the malaria initiative).

- June 16 or 17: General Assembly debate on Implementation of the 2001 Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, based on the 2009 Report of the UNSG.

The consultation process
The plans for responding to the resolution, including the consultations with Member States will be introduced during the World Health Assembly in May 2009.

WHO will make available to interested Member States a background paper on Global Health and Foreign Policy: Strategic Opportunities and Challenges, written to provide information and analysis for the consultation process and the report.

Member States will be invited to make initial inputs in terms of what should be considered as the key opportunities, issues and challenges in the interface between health and foreign policy, where foreign policy can add value and where the session of the General Assembly can make a significant contribution. A special effort will be made to engage the Member States cosponsoring the General Assembly Resolution in the early phase of the consultation process. Member States will be encouraged to bring together views and issues from their ministries of health and foreign affairs as inputs through the consultation process.

Facilitated consultations by and with interested Member States will be arranged at the key events relating to global health during June and July.

An annotated outline of the draft report, capturing key issues identified, will be available for discussions at the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in July. Subsequently, a revised and further elaborated outline will be available for review to support additional consultations and inputs by Member States and other UN agencies following the ECOSOC meeting.

WHO will submit a draft of the report to the UN SG Office for their finalization prior to the September General Assembly meeting.

Further information and contacts
Please refer to www.who.int/trade/Foreignpolicyandhealth/en/index.html for a list of questions that may be helpful in guiding Member State discussions, reference documents and additional information.

In addition, specific questions and inputs can be directed to WHO at  ghfp@who.int.