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Making Taiwan a partner in global health by granting Taiwan observer status at the World Health Assembly

Motion for a recommendation
presented by Mr Leibrecht and others

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only the members who have signed it

1. Infectious diseases such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria, SARS and avian influenza are spreading worldwide. In view of this, worldwide cooperation to achieve effective, reliable and coordinated disease control and for the prevention and containment of the spread of infectious diseases has gained added importance.
2. The World Health Organization (WHO) plays a central role in the development and continuous improvement of a global health network. For this reason, regular and institutionalized involvement of the greatest possible number of relevant actors in WHO and direct and comprehensive access to the Organization are necessary on account of the related direct and unhindered participation in international forums and programmes of cooperation in the field of health care.
3. According to an assessment by WHO, the risk of pandemic influenza, especially in view of the spread of avian influenza, is "serious", and the probability of a pandemic occurring has "increased". WHO notes that, now more than ever, in the age of globalization and widespread international travel and commerce, a pandemic can affect all regions of the world. Close cooperation with public health authorities in all affected regions worldwide is required in order for WHO's epidemiological, clinical and logistical support to be effective.
4. Since 1972, Taiwan has been excluded from WHO and the majority of WHO's activities. Since then, there has been no systematic, regulated or institutionalized participation of Taiwan in WHO or its bodies. This also means that Taiwan cannot participate in the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN). In connection with avian influenza, cooperation between WHO and Taiwan is inadequate; for example, Taiwan has been excluded from meetings dealing with the influenza issue.
5. Yet the involvement of Taiwan in the efforts to contain avian influenza is of great importance not only for the 23 million Taiwanese. As one of the most important international transportation hubs in the Western Pacific, Taiwan should be included in the outbreak response network. What is more, Taiwan is a major stop along the route of different migratory birds: around 1.25 million migratory birds pass through Taiwan or spend the winter there. WHO and its Member States would benefit directly from the involvement of Taiwan: Taiwan is a pioneer in the field of health care systems in Asia; it set up the first comprehensive health insurance system in Asia; it has a high number of doctors per capita; it has overcome numerous contagious diseases such as plague, smallpox, rabies, malaria and polio; and, therefore, has much that it can contribute.

6. Direct and regulated involvement of Taiwan in the work of WHO would already be attainable with observer status at the World Health Assembly (WHA), the supreme decision-making body of WHO.
7. To date, Taiwan's efforts to acquire observer status have been rejected on the grounds that Taiwan is not recognized by most of the international community as an independent nation and is not a member of the United Nations. However, the Constitution of WHO provides for the admission of states that are not members of the United Nations by a simple majority vote (Chapter III, Article 6). Moreover, the WHA can invite international and national organizations and non-governmental organizations to participate in the activities of WHO (Article 18 h). In this way, observer status at the WHA was granted in the past to Palestine in 1974, Malta, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, and they are routinely invited to WHA meetings.
8. In the past years, a number of countries have spoken out in favour of observer status for Taiwan at the WHA: the US Congress with a law signed by President George W. Bush, the European Parliament and individual national parliaments such as the Belgian House of Representatives and the Canadian House of Commons. In addition, an extensive debate arose at the 57th World Health Assembly in 2004 during the course of which 16 of 48 states, among them the USA and Japan, spoke out in favour of granting observer status to Taiwan. Moreover, a number of international non-governmental organizations such as the International Pediatric Association, the International Council of Nurses, the World Medicine Association, the Federation of International Pharmacies and the International College of Surgeons endorse the participation of Taiwan in WHO.
9. The Assembly's and Council of Europe's support for the admission of Taiwan as an observer at the WHA – for example, as a "health entity" – would not signify acknowledgement of Taiwan's "sovereignty" and would be consistent with the "One-China Policy".
10. Therefore, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers supports:
 - i. the inclusion of Taiwan's request for observer status at the WHA as an additional item on the Assembly agenda at its next session, 22-27 May 2007;
 - ii. the request that Taiwan be granted observer status at the upcoming World Health Assembly (WHA);
 - iii. that it should immediately receive direct and comprehensive access to advice and support by WHO and, within this context, be allowed to assist in the worldwide control and containment of avian influenza.

*Signed*¹:

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¹ SOC: Socialist Group
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party
ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe
EDG: European Democratic Group
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left
NR: not registered in a group