

Dr. Tedros Adhanom set to remain World Health Organization chief



World Health Organization Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus

Geneva, January 26 (RHC)-- World Health Organization chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus is all but guaranteed a second term after a procedural vote made him the sole nominee for a leadership election in May.

The first African leader of the UN health agency said he was “very grateful for the renewed support,” after the WHO’s executive board held a secret-ballot vote on Tuesday approving his nomination as the only candidate for the post of director-general.

“I am actually lost for words,” the visibly moved WHO chief said after nearly all of the board’s 34 members, representing countries from around the world, threw their weight behind him. He was only missing three votes: from absentees Tonga, Afghanistan and East Timor, according to a diplomatic source.

The former Ethiopian minister of health and foreign affairs is thus expected to be re-elected when all 194 WHO member states cast their ballots in May for the next director-general. Tedros, one of the most recognisable figures of the global battle against COVID-19, acknowledged that his first five-year term had been “challenging and difficult,” and said it was a “great honor” to be given the opportunity to continue the battle.

Since the coronavirus pandemic began in 2020, the 56-year-old malaria specialist has received much praise for the way he has steered the WHO through the crisis. “We appreciate not only your leadership during this period, but also your humanity and your compassion,” South Korean representative Kim Ganglip said, speaking for WHO’s western Pacific region.

African countries have been pleased with the attention paid to the continent and at his relentless campaign for poorer nations to receive a fair share of COVID-19 vaccines.

Tedros’s second term will likely be dominated by the towering task of strengthening the WHO, after COVID-19 exposed its weaknesses. “The pandemic has highlighted the challenges we face; that the world was not prepared,” he said during a two-hour hearing before Tuesday’s vote.

Many countries are demanding significant reforms, but their extent and shape have yet to be defined, with some nations wary a stronger WHO might encroach on their sovereignty. Tedros is also calling for a vast reform of financing, warning funds are lacking to respond to the numerous crises WHO faces around the globe.

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