

World Health Organization members agreed Monday to strengthen the global body by giving it more secure and flexible funding to better deal with future outbreaks.

All the 194 member states, in a 14-page resolution on the last day of the virtual annual World Health Assembly, also agreed to “strengthen WHO’s capacity to rapidly and appropriately assess disease outbreaks” of possible global concern.

Member states took some steps towards securing that future as they voted to approve a \$6.83 billion budget for 2024-2025 — an 11 percent increase from 2022-2023.

The new budget includes a 20 percent increase in member state fees — welcomed by WHO as it attempts to move away from unreliable voluntary contributions that currently make up the vast majority of its funding.

They also debated the ongoing efforts of an already overstretched institution, praising WHO for its COVID-19 response, but questioning its capacity to meet future emergencies.

Countries and institutions called for a total overhaul of the global alarm system and for a stronger, more independent WHO to help avert future pandemics. One of the reports found that the UN agency had been too slow in declaring a so-called Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

WHO sounded its highest level of alert on January 30, 2020. After days of discussion, members agreed to create a new working group to study and streamline the numerous recommendations in the reports and create concrete proposals for next year’s assembly to consider.

The text called for member states to “ensure the adequate, flexible, sustainable and predictable financing of WHO’s program budget. “Only about 16 percent of the WHO budget comes from regular membership fees, with the remainder coming from voluntary and heavily earmarked contributions.

Monday’s resolution also called on all countries to strengthen their core public health capacities, increase their ability to detect new threats, and communicate such threats effectively both at home and internationally.

To ensure all nations do their part, it also instructed WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus to consider creating a pilot project for countries to submit to regular

peer reviews of their pandemic preparedness by other members, in the same way, they undergo reviews of their rights situations before the UN Human Rights Council.

The resolution meanwhile stopped short of explicitly backing the experts' recommendation to hand the WHO broader powers to launch investigations or communicate about health threats without waiting for a green light from the countries concerned.

Also on Monday, countries decided to put off discussing whether or not to move towards creating an international treaty to prepare for the next global pandemic until later this year.

They ordered Tedros to convene a special session of the assembly in late November" dedicated to considering the benefits of developing a WHO convention, agreement or another international instrument on pandemic preparedness and response".

Only two international treaties have previously been negotiated under the auspices of the WHO in its 73-year history: the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control in 2003 and the International Health Regulations in 2005.