

NEWS

WHO is criticised for political process used when choosing its new Africa director

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The World Health Organization has appointed a new director of its African regional office. Matshidiso Moeti will take over from the current director, Luis Gomes Sambo, on 1 February 2015 when Sambo's 10 year term of office expires.

Moeti has worked in WHO's African regional office since 1999. She started as regional adviser for women's and adolescent health, then worked as regional adviser for HIV/AIDS and director of the division of non-communicable diseases before becoming deputy regional director. Before working at WHO she led the epidemiology unit at Botswana's ministry of health and has worked at Unicef and UNAIDS.

Five candidates received nominations for the position, which were then put to a secret ballot of the 47 member states of the regional office. Moeti won the vote and her name will go forward for approval by WHO's executive board meeting in January—essentially a rubber stamping process.

The African region was due to select a new director in September but the appointment was delayed until this month because of the Ebola outbreak in west Africa.

Amanda Glassman, director of global health policy at the Center for Global Development in the United States, told *The BMJ* that the appointment process was lacking transparency. She described it as a "political process," with a lot of "behind the scenes horse trading" between countries over the list of nominees.

"It's a question of whether the appointment process should be managed in a political manner or whether it should [be] advertised internationally—even if you restrict it to Africa—with an independent committee of highly qualified people, who review the nominees or put forward a shortlist," she said.

Glassman said that she did not want to take a view on the candidates themselves but was concerned whether Moeti, who has 15 years of experience in the regional office, was the right candidate for reform. "Sometimes reformers from within are

good, sometimes they don't necessarily bring a new vision," she said.

In an interview with Glassman for the centre's blog, Moeti said that WHO's handling of the Ebola outbreak had been poor.¹ "The outbreak is unusual but the response has not been sufficient and perhaps could have been quicker. But this applies to WHO as well as the whole international community," she said.

Peter Piot, director of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, has been critical of the WHO regional office, telling the *Guardian*, "What should be WHO's strongest regional office because of the enormity of the health challenges is actually the weakest technically, and full of political appointees."²

A draft WHO document on the handling of the Ebola outbreak, which was leaked to the press, reported that WHO "failed to see some fairly plain writing on the wall."³

Charles Clift, a senior research consultant at the Centre for Global Health Security at Chatham House think tank in London, said that documents for this week's regional office meeting did not reflect the Ebola controversy. "You might have expected them to address some of the criticisms," he said.

Access all of *The BMJ's* content on the ongoing Ebola outbreak at thebmj.com/ebola.

- 1 Center for Global Development. Selecting WHO's next Africa regional director: an interview with candidate Dr Matshidiso Moeti. 30 Oct 2014. www.cgdev.org/blog/selecting-whos-next-africa-regional-director-interview-candidate-dr-matshidiso-moeti.
- 2 Boseley S. World Health Organisation admits botching response to Ebola outbreak. *Guardian* 2014 Oct 17. www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/17/world-health-organisation-botched-ebola-outbreak.
- 3 Kmietowicz Z. WHO will review its response to Ebola once outbreak is under control. *BMJ* 2014;349:g6390.

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