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The Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) presents her compliments to Member States and Associate Members and has the honour to refer to the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) and "WHO Nomenclature Regulations" adopted in May 1967 in reference to Articles 2(s), 21(b), 22 and 64 of the Constitution of the World Health Organization.

The ICD was first created in 1853 by the International Statistical Congress. Since 1948, WHO has been responsible for the ICD and it has been revised successively five times. The 10th revision of the ICD was adopted by the World Health Assembly in 1990 (resolution WHA43.24) with the recommendation of the establishment of an updating process within the ten-year revision cycle.

Over the last sixty years, the ICD has become the international classification standard for all general epidemiological and many health management purposes. In accordance with the WHO Nomenclature Regulations, Member States compiling mortality and morbidity statistics shall do so in accordance with the current revision of the ICD as adopted from time to time by the World Health Assembly.

Given the mandate by the World Health Assembly in 1990, WHO has established an updating process to incorporate new scientific knowledge (e.g. SARS and new emerging diseases) and also systematically planned for a revision of the ICD by 2015 in order to enable a wider implementation of the classification. To start this process, a revision plan has been developed after discussions with a number of WHO Collaborating Centres and other interested parties. A coordinated series of methods will be utilized to revise the current ICD-10 to arrive at a new generation of classification. The ICD-11 revision will proceed in three stages:

- (1) systematic review of scientific, clinical and public health evidence relevant to classification and collection of revision proposals from interested parties. This information will be compiled in an internet site: extranet.who.int/icdrevison which will be open to all users by 16 April 2007 and comments will be collected over a period of two years;
- (2) creation of a draft ICD-11 and field-testing of it (2009–2012); and
- (3) adoption by the World Health Assembly in 2015 and implementation.