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## WHO elects Ethiopia's Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus as its new director general

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May 23, 2017



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Ethiopia's former health minister has been elected to serve as the next director-general of the World Health Organization — the first African picked to lead the global health agency.

Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, 52, will succeed Dr. Margaret Chan on July 1.

It took three rounds of secret-ballot voting for Tedros — who is known by his first name — to claim the top job on Tuesday. But from the start of balloting it was clear momentum was going his way.

He topped every vote, starting in January when the WHO's executive board whittled a long list of six candidates down to the final three.

On Tuesday, he was the top vote-getter in a three-way faceoff, knocking Dr. Sania Nishtar, 54, of Pakistan, out of competition. He defeated Dr. David Nabarro, 67, of Britain in the final ballot.

Nabarro, a long-time UN senior official, congratulated Tedros on Twitter.

Congratulations to [@DrTedros](#)<sup>1</sup> on his new role as Director-General of [@WHO](#)<sup>2</sup>. I urge everyone to unite behind him & his vision [#WHA70](#)<sup>3</sup> [pic.twitter.com/kPcQcFWJ8M](https://pic.twitter.com/kPcQcFWJ8M)<sup>4</sup>

— Dr David Nabarro (@davidnabarro) [May 23, 2017](#)<sup>5</sup>

Tedros will be the first non-physician to lead the WHO; he has a doctorate in community health. He served as Ethiopia's health minister from 2005 to 2012 and is credited for innovative reforms to the health delivery system of a resource-poor country. Supporters see that experience as something that will benefit the cash-strapped WHO.

He will be taking over an agency that is also widely seen to have badly bungled the early days of the 2014 Ebola crisis in West Africa. Multiple postmortem reports have [called for significant reform](#)<sup>6</sup> of the WHO in the wake of that outbreak.

Many public health experts are hopeful Tedros can turn the agency around.

“As someone who has worked tirelessly to reform health systems in Ethiopia and across Africa, he will bring great insight and the political leadership necessary to restore trust in the WHO at a critical moment in its history,” said Dr. Jeremy Farrar, director of the Wellcome Trust.

“Tedros's commitment to immunization is clear,” said Dr. Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, the vaccine alliance. “His work with Gavi as Ethiopia's health minister helped boost the proportion of children reached by vaccines from less than half to more than two-thirds, preventing the deaths of thousands of children.”

Tedros is the first director-general to be [chosen by the organization's 194 member countries](#)<sup>7</sup>. Previously the selection was made by the WHO's executive board — a rotating committee of 34 member countries, serving three-year terms; the full membership merely rubber stamped the executive board's choice.

In addition to having served as health minister, Tedros was Ethiopia's foreign minister from 2012 to 2016 and is seen as a skilled diplomat — an important skill at a time when the WHO faces [potentially deeper budget challenges](#)<sup>8</sup>.

Tedros has also served as chairman of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, and was also at a point chairman of the Roll Back Malaria partnership board.

While Tedros has plenty of ardent supporters, he also has a sizeable number of vocal critics. Members of the Ethiopian diaspora have pleaded with the countries voting in the election to reject Tedros as a representative of a repressive political regime.

And late in the campaign, a supporter of Nabarro's [questioned Tedros's record in Ethiopia](#)<sup>9</sup>, saying the country had covered up cholera outbreaks that should have been declared to the WHO. Tedros denied the allegation, saying the outbreaks in question were "acute watery diarrhea" that occurred in remote areas where laboratory testing capacity was limited.

Tom Frieden, a former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, was among those who defended Tedros. On Tuesday, he welcomed the news that the former health minister will take the helm in Geneva.

"Tedros is an excellent choice to lead WHO. He succeeded in Ethiopia, making remarkable health progress by rapidly reforming a sclerotic bureaucracy and implementing effective community-based services," Frieden said. "Precisely the same thing is needed to make WHO effective providing technical guidance and improving support to countries."

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