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Date: 31 March 2021

Ms Tamar Gabunia
First Deputy Minister
National Counterpart
Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the
Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social
Affairs
144, Ak. Tsereteli Ave.
0119 Tbilisi
Georgia

Dear Ms Gabunia,

Based on a review of the performance of the National Influenza Centres (NICs) in the WHO European Region during the 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 influenza seasons, I am pleased to inform you that the WHO-recognized NIC in Georgia headed by Dr Ann Machabishvili at the Centre for Disease Control and Public Health meets the criteria and will continue to be recognized by WHO.

NICs play a key role in influenza (sentinel) surveillance at the national level and contribute to regional and global surveillance through the Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS). The data generated by the NICs are critical to understanding the timing and spread of influenza epidemics and the contribution of different viruses to morbidity and mortality. For the WHO European Region, the data are reported weekly in the *Flu News Europe* bulletin jointly produced by the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC).

According to the Terms of Reference (ToR), NICs are requested to share representative seasonal influenza viruses (either positive samples or influenza virus isolates) by shipping them to a WHO Collaborating Centre (WHO CC) for Reference and Research on Influenza. Characterization of these viruses collected from the whole GISRS network contributes to the biannual selection of viruses for seasonal influenza vaccines and to the monitoring of susceptibility to antiviral drugs.

In compliance with the Standard Material Transfer Agreement of the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Framework, NICs are also requested to send emerging influenza viruses with pandemic potential as well as clinical specimens and/or viruses that cannot be readily identified with diagnostic reagents to a WHO CC or WHO H5 Reference Laboratory of their choice.

In addition, NICs should regularly assess their competencies by taking part in External Quality Assessment Programmes (EQAPs), in particular the annual EQAP organized by the WHO Global Influenza Programme with the Centre for Health Protection in Hong Kong SAR (China).

The pandemic of COVID-19 that started in early 2020 has clearly affected the normal functioning of influenza surveillance systems and the work of the NIC across the countries of the European Region during the 2020/2021 season. The 2021/2022 influenza season will also be difficult, but the sentinel surveillance systems should be maintained as they will prove to be essential tools when the pandemic

phase of SARS-CoV-2 ultimately ends, and in the eventuality that SARS-CoV-2 becomes a seasonal virus.

It is thus of paramount importance that, as the Ministry of Health, you continue to support the NIC in your country so that it can fulfil its missions within the WHO NIC ToR and further strengthen the epidemiological and virological surveillance of seasonal and emerging influenza viruses and other respiratory viruses of public health concern.

WHO will of course continue to support the NIC in your country by providing technical guidance, training and networking opportunities.

I would like to warmly thank your country for collaborating so closely with WHO and I look forward to its continuation.

Yours very truly,



Dr Dorit Nitzan
Regional Emergency Director

Copy for information to:

H.E. Mr Alexander Maisuradze, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva, Rue Richard-Wagner 1, CH-1202 Genève, Switzerland

Mr Kakhaber Shishniashvili, Chargé d'Affaires, Counselor, Embassy of Georgia, Kalvebodbygge 45, 1560 Copenhagen V, Denmark

Ms Sabine Machl, United Nations Resident Coordinator, UN Development Coordination Office, UN House, 9 Eristavi St., 0179 Tbilisi, Georgia

Dr Silviu Domente, WHO Representative and Head of WHO Office, WHO Country Office, Georgia, 81 Barnov Street, Mailing address: UN House, 9 Eristavi street, 0179 Tbilisi, Georgia

Enclosure

**Details of the National Influenza Centre in your country, status of WHO recognition
and key reference documents**

NICs should demonstrate each year that they comply with the WHO NIC terms of reference. Those NICs that do not meet the criteria will have one year to take corrective action, which will be supported by WHO where possible.

Thank you for reviewing the NIC details below and for informing us of any changes.

1. NIC details

Ann Machablashvili
National Influenza Center
Centre for Disease Control and Public Health
0177 Tbilisi
Georgia
Fax: +995 32 2 311485

Status of WHO recognition in 2020/2021

- ☒ Maintained: NIC meets the criteria
- ☐ Provisionally maintained: NIC failed to meet all the criteria

2. Key reference materials:

1. How to become a WHO-recognized National Influenza Centre: Guidance on the process for influenza laboratories in the WHO European Region [web site]. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe; (<http://www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/diseases-and-conditions/influenza/publications/2010/how-to-become-a-who-recognized-national-influenza-centre-guidance-on-the-process-for-influenza-laboratories-in-the-who-european-region>).

2. Terms of Reference for National Influenza Centres [web site]. Geneva: World Health Organization; (http://www.who.int/influenza/gisn_laboratory/national_influenza_centres/terms_of_reference_for_national_influenza_centres.pdf).

3. Pandemic influenza preparedness framework for the sharing of influenza viruses and access to vaccines and other benefits. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2011 (<http://www.who.int/influenza/pip/en/>).

4. European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control/WHO Regional Office for Europe, Flu News Europe, joint weekly influenza update; (<http://flunewseurope.org/>).