

Press Release

World Health Organization's independence and integrity are non-negotiable

Geneva, 24 May 2016 –Civil Society Organizations and Social Movements call upon WHO Member States not to compromise the independence, integrity and credibility of the WHO while negotiating on Framework on Engagement with Non-State Actors (FENSA). A joint statement signed by 59 organization's called on Member States to put in place a robust framework to protect WHO from the undue influence of venture philanthropy foundations with large conflicted investments, private sector and private sector influenced NGOs. Further, the statement calls for a comprehensive conflict of interest policy.

“Many proposals by rich countries in the draft FENSA text and in the resolution to adopt it are increasing risks of corporate capture of WHO under the guise of promoting engagements. The real intent, however, is avoiding the creation of a comprehensive mechanism to adequately deal with conflicts of interest. These proposals if accepted would institutionalise the undue corporate influence on WHO. We are particularly concerned about the new Official Relations policy”, said Lida Lhotska, International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN)

There is an urgent need to fix the structural issues which increases WHO's vulnerability to undue influence. Therefore Member States should address these structural issues on an urgent basis.

“What lies at the heart of the discussions around FENSA are concerns that the private sector has progressively increased its influence over important functions of the WHO including its norm setting role. This in turn is being driven by WHO's financial crisis and the impasse as a consequence of the freeze on assessed contributions. In a situation where 80% of contributions to WHO's finances is tied funding, the WHO is being pushed to accommodate the interests of non-state actors, including big business and influential private foundations”, said Amit Sengupta, People's Health Movement.

FENSA negotiation started in April 2015 and have resulted in some progress, such as for proactive disclosure of financial contributions and the prohibition of secondments from the private sector. However, there is no consensus on some critical issues. Member States are yet to reach a consensus on the prohibition of private sector resources for WHO's core functions: norms, standard and policy setting. Similarly, the current FENSA text removed an existing regulation against accepting financial resources for funding the salary of WHO staff.

“The FENSA should strengthen rather than weaken existing safeguards against undue influence. This week's negotiation, which is expected to conclude FENSA, should not legitimize the path for undue influence”, said K M Gopakumar, Third World Network (TWN)

For more information, please contact

Lida Lhotska, (IBFAN), +41788200850, lida.lhotska@gifa.org

Dr. Amit Sengupta, (PHM) +91 9810611425, asengupta@phmovement.org

K M Gopakumar, (TWN), +41786547641, kmgkumar@gmail.com