

Stichting Health Action International (HAI)

Meeting:

Sixty-eighth World Health Assembly (A68/1)

Agenda Item:

11.2 Framework of engagement with non-State actors

Statement:

We applaud the initiative of Member States and WHO in drafting FENSA. This is an unprecedented step and we eagerly await the arrival of a publicly available registry of NSAs. We remain concerned about three key areas.

WHO should exercise particular caution when engaging with industries affecting human health or affected by WHO's norms and standards. We recall recent examples of industry interference on public health:

Twenty-five pharmaceuticals were implicated in a planned campaign to delay South Africa's draft IP policy reforms, which aimed to increase access to medicines in their country.

The NYC Board of Health's limit on the size of sugary drinks was thwarted by a campaign funded by the beverage lobby and various legal challenges.

Let's not forget that in 2003, the US sugar industry threatened to slash WHO funding via US Congress over planned guidelines on sugar intake.

Just 2 months ago, it was revealed that IFBA engaged in direct lobbying of Member States to ensure their industries were not excluded from FENSA.

We advocate for delineating industries up-front in FENSA where WHO should exercise caution.

Secondly, evidence gathered by NSA's should be made available to Member States for independent verification. This is crucial to avoid misguided research agendas driven by industry, such as was the case with tobacco and sugar industries decades ago.

Lastly, we support a ceiling on NSA contributions, above which monies would go to the core voluntary fund. WHO should never be hamstrung by donor-driven priorities in its ability to mobilize resources quickly.

Private interests cannot be allowed to drive policy-making. We urge Member States to ensure FENSA creates a strong enough "fence" to safeguard public health against private interests. WHO must be given the mandate to assess conflicts of interest, monitor ongoing risks of engagement, and manage engagements with full transparency.

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