Conflicts of Interest and the Future of Financing for WHO.

Statement on WHO governance and the Management of Conflicts of Interest and the Future of Financing for WHO.

We write to express our concerns about governance of the World Health Organization (WHO) and other public health bodies, as regards the management of conflicts of interest.

WHO and other public health institutions have complex relations with commercial entities that supply health care products and services. In some cases the commercial entities are subject to or in need of regulation, in order to protect consumers and promote the public interest. Public health institutions are also often engaged in buying goods and services, or providing financial assistance for such purchases.

It is therefore widely recognized that governments and public health institutions like the WHO must avoid conflicts of interest in all aspects of governance. WHO can only respond meaningfully to the challenges of public health through greater transparency and accountability guided by the priorities of Member States and the advance of public interest. However, transparency is a necessary but not sufficient safe guard: there must also be a clear approach and policy to ensure that those representing commercial interests are not part of policy and norm setting decision making.

We are concerned that proposals in the current debate over WHO reform, particularly in the report on ‘The future of financing for WHO, World Health Organization: reforms for a healthy future’, do not adequately address the management of conflicts of interest, and present an unrealistic and empirically unsupported assumption that all stakeholders will collaborate to advance the public interest.

We ask the WHO members to ensure that any changes in governance structures address in a realistic manner the risks that conflicts of interest will frustrate efforts to protect consumers and the public interest. In this regard, we emphasize also the importance of evaluating the conflicts of interest by pharmaceutical companies, vaccine manufacturers, the processed food industry, the nuclear power industry and other industries that cause environmental contamination and private donors who have complex private interests.

Specifically, we ask WHO members to guard against initiatives that will give private

interests and donors a greater role in WHO governance. For this reason, we are calling on member countries to oppose the World Health Forum and the governance of the Decade of Vaccines.

Berne Declaration

GTPI/Rebrip

Health Action International (HAI)

IBFAN

Knowledge Ecology International (KEI)

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF)

Oxfam International

People’s Health Movement (PHM)

Third World Network (TWN)

Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM)