

EU Must Not Miss its Chance on WHO Technology Pool

We recently shared our comments and observations on the [zero draft resolution](#) being circulated by the European Commission representation ahead of the World Health Assembly. We commended their leadership and welcomed support for a multilateral approach to the COVID-19 pandemic. It's a first step, and shows promise for what is now needed and expected from the European Union (EU) and its Member States:

We welcome the zero-draft resolution on COVID-19 promoted by the EU and commend its leadership for its multilateral response to the global pandemic at the 73rd World Health Assembly. It is an extensive and comprehensive text that acknowledges the importance of civil society participation and a human rights approach as essential elements of an effective response, by governments and international actors.

Both the preamble and the operative paragraphs should include mention of all relevant World Health Organization (WHO) initiatives, such as the Global Strategy on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual Property (GSPoA) and Resolution WHA72.8 (transparency of markets for medicines, vaccines, and other health products). Both documents address critical elements of not only any effective response to COVID-19, but also the chance to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

The resolution fails to fully reflect and embrace the growing consensus that this unprecedented situation calls for extraordinary measures on how to promote the development, conduct clinical trials or guarantee the supply of any vaccine or other therapeutic responses at an affordable price. It is our belief that a 'business as usual' approach is unacceptable and that stakeholders, including governments and private actors, should be persuaded that patent-based monopolies and other market exclusivities are not only inefficient but morally questionable, as would be geographical limitations of any sort in the supply or distribution of remedial or preventive interventions.

Compulsory Licensing: Justified in the Face of Unaffordable Medicine Prices

The use of instruments such as Compulsory Licenses was justified before COVID-19 in the face of unaffordable medicine prices, anti-competitive practices and other obstacles to the protection and promotion of public health; as some EU Member States have publicly stated during the current outbreak, Compulsory Licences are a valid tool to secure timely and comprehensive access to effective treatments. The resolution should explicitly support this option, and in addition recognise countries with no pharmaceutical production capacity that would rely on WHO led international cooperation.

We consider it important for the EU to acknowledge clearly and explicitly support the Costa

Rica proposal to establish a COVID-19 technology pool, hosted and managed by WHO. Such a pool could be an ideal platform through which information and data is shared, not only about treatments, diagnostic/testing mechanisms but also Health Technology Assessments (HTA) and clinical trial data, amongst other relevant information that researchers are already sharing. The support of the EU, one of the largest funders of scientific research in the world, would be meaningful. A feasibility study of the pool, including legal and institutional basis, should be completed before the end of 2020.

At a time when the role of WHO in Global Health is being undermined by unilateral forces, it is important that Member States ratify its leadership within the UN system in the fight against COVID-19. Any collaboration with other UN agencies, international organisations or private entities should be shaped by a public health-oriented agenda characterised by transparency, accountability, and evidence-based interventions. An underfunded WHO is a weaker WHO in a more perilous world, the EU must call on Member States to lead by the example by contributing to the general budget of the organisation while, if they so wish, providing additional funds and in-kind cooperation to specific programmes.