

Medical Technologies for COVID-19 Developed with Public Money Must be Recognised as Global Public Goods

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AMSTERDAM—Ahead of the 73rd World Health Assembly (WHA73) on Monday 18 May, Health Action International (HAI) Senior Policy Advisor, Jaume Vidal, made the following statement:

“WHA73 is far more than just a meeting of the World Health Organization (WHO) governing body. More than any of the 72 sessions that have come before, it constitutes a test of the international community’s ability and willingness to work together to tackle global health threats. At such an important juncture, the absence of meaningful participation by public interest organisations will undoubtedly forestall the good governance and ultimate effectiveness of what needs to be a united endeavour.

That said, we commend the leadership shown by the European Commission for tabling the draft resolution on a joint response to COVID-19 and acknowledge the engagement of delegations in the text negotiation. Again though, it is more than unfortunate that civil society could not follow the discussions nor contribute their insight and expertise to the debate. Also disappointing is the apparent reluctance of some Member States to achieve an agreed text with enough force to guarantee the availability of the tools needed to end this crisis.

It is regrettable that the (presumably) approved text does not contain stronger language regarding the use of TRIPS flexibilities, or indeed affordability clauses for publicly-funded research. While we understand that every negotiation is a trade-off and that consensus is not always easy to reach, the current circumstances require that universal values of solidarity and respect for human dignity come ahead of other interests.

Conspicuous by its absence is strong and unequivocal support for a solid mandate for a COVID-19 technology pool, hosted and managed by the WHO, as proposed by Costa Rica and endorsed by several Member States. While WHO has no enforcement power, we do not believe that the pool can function or deliver results if based exclusively on a voluntary system. As others have signalled, we strongly believe that any product—medicine, vaccine or diagnostic—developed with public money, by whatever mechanism, should be placed in the pool. These are global public goods that must be made available to everyone, everywhere.”

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