

Progress on access to medicines at WHA67, but WHO funding sorely needed

by TIM REED



Access to essential medicines was a hot topic at the 67th World Health Assembly (WHA) last week in Geneva. Given our 'official relations' status with the World Health Organization (WHO), Health Action International was pleased to deliver a number of interventions to inform discussion and advocate for medicines access issues. We also co-hosted a well-attended side event, 'Innovation and access to medicines and vaccines: Emerging challenges and opportunities for middle-income countries', with Mèdecins Sans Frontières, Knowledge Ecology International, Treatment Action Group, Oxfam and the Civil Society Coalition, which sparked tremendous discussion and debate.

This year, more than 20 resolutions on global public health issues were passed by the WHA—an encouraging result that demonstrates the engagement and commitment of Member States. But now that the lights have gone down on the WHA, the focus shifts to how these resolutions will be implemented and achieve their desired impact.

In order for the WHO to fulfil the mandate of the WHA and its resolutions on access to medicines, it needs money—lots of it. Specifically, the resources and capacity of the department of Essential Medicines and Pharmaceutical Policies needs to be rebuilt. Without it, urgent work on access to medicines will be limited, or eliminated.

Now, more than ever, given the growing complexity of health issues, WHO Member States must not only act in their own countries to deliver quality health services to citizens—they must fulfil their international obligation to fund the WHO by paying their membership dues in full. In addition, donors, such as foundations, must also continue to be generous.

Without sufficient WHO funding, global health will suffer.

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