

Statement to EB148 on WHO reform: involvement of non-State actors in WHO's governing bodies

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HAI made the following statement to the 148th session of the WHO Executive Board, in which we addressed the WHO reform: involvement of non-state actors in WHO's governing bodies.

Health Action International welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed engagement with non-state actors in WHO's governing bodies.

We appreciate the proposal for enhanced technical exchanges, comprising time-limited meetings between [non-state actors](#) and WHO technical units and further meetings between non-state actors and WHO governing bodies, may be an additional opportunity to enrich engagement and contribute to global public health. However, the lack of detail as to how they are to happen, who will be invited, who will manage the agenda and other rules of procedure remain a concern for those who have witnessed creeping opacity and poor consultation with non-state actors in recent years. We would like to be very clear: public interest-driven non-governmental organisations have a legitimate role to play in WHO's governing bodies very different from that of trade associations, philanthropic foundations, funders and other non-state actors.

Our overriding concern, however, is that technical exchanges will mask the disappearance of meaningful engagement elsewhere. For example, the notion of joint statements at governing bodies through 'constituencies'. Frankly, they will not work as they are based in a misconception. The fact is non-state actors represent an entire spectrum of size, mission, structure and mandate, almost each with specialist expertise in every, some or several aspects of WHO's work. Not being a government is not the only common ground. Moreover, corraling non-state actors into constituencies and inviting them to organise themselves is not only an abdication of WHO's role as honest broker, but will reinforce power imbalances between and within non-state actors, and worsen conflicts of interest which are hard to avoid in multi-actor non-state actor engagement, as scepticism and suspicion of the FENSA implementation shows.

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