

World Health Assembly 67: HAI intervention on access to essential medicines

by TIM REED

☒ Health Action International (HAI) welcomes the resolution on access to medicines and is reassured that access to medicines is, again, being moved to prominence on the global health agenda.

It is impossible to achieve anything approaching universal health coverage without a comprehensive access to medicines and rational use of medicines systems approach. It is a tribute to the World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners that it has brought us this far on essential medicines, rational use of medicines, transparency, good governance, and evidence-based policy intervention.

In fact, medicines work has never received more attention. Most, if not all, of the discussion at this Assembly has involved some aspect of access to medicines, and an unprecedented number of resolutions are specifically concerned with medicines policy.

But no one speaks of how this crucial work is to be financed, and long-standing concerns remain unresolved. Work on the essential medicines list, rational use of medicines, medicines pricing and in-country policy support, among others, remain woefully underfunded.

Whilst budgets have been allocated to pay for some headquarter, regional and country access to medicines work, 'a hallucinatory discussion' continues, with the Assembly requiring the extra work implied by these vital medicines resolutions to be funded from a budget allocation, formulated before they were passed.

Access to medicines is the cornerstone of health for all, and resolutions, on which member states, the secretariat and civil society spend so much time and effort, are a vital component of strategies to combat health inequality. But they remain subject to the whim of donors and unless they are properly funded from a core allocation, they will, I fear, remain worthless.

Health Action International calls on member states, donors and the secretariat to ensure that sufficient funds are made available to the appropriate department at WHO to ensure implementation.