

# **World Health Assembly Executive Board 136: YP-CDN and HAI intervention on the progress achieved in the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases**

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Thank you Chair and esteemed delegates:

I am speaking on behalf of Health Action International and the Young Professionals Chronic Disease Network.

At last year's Executive Board meeting, we heard an impassioned plea from South Africa whose draft reforms to their domestic intellectual property policy were under threat by a lobbying firm who planned a subversive campaign to block these reforms, reforms which aimed to improve access to medicines in their country.

Our research and development system is failing - we have seen this in the context of HIV/AIDS and are now we are seeing it with non-communicable diseases. While older NCD drugs are off-patent and affordable, newer drugs are out of reach of the majority. As one example, a breast cancer medication, Trastuzumab, costs between \$23,000-78,000 per patient per year. This is unacceptable.

This time last year we also heard from Australia - who stood by South Africa and affirmed that they too struggled to temper intellectual property rights in the interest of public health. Australia was the first country to require plain packaging of tobacco - and subsequently faced numerous legal assaults by tobacco firms who opposed the country's violation of corporate trademarks.

Elsewhere - in New York City, the board of health passed legislation to limit the size of sugary drinks. Unfortunately, this was ultimately overturned following various legal challenges.

In all three instances - make no mistake - spurious campaigns designed to undermine these measures for NCD control were funded by corporations and their interests - pharmaceuticals, tobacco, and the beverage lobby.

Measures for NCD control must be driven by the best public health evidence, free of conflicts of interest.

Member States must be able to implement their NCD action plans without fear of legal repercussions and political pressure. This is their right - and this right warrants the full support of intergovernmental organizations, including WHO.

Countries must make full use of TRIPS flexibilities both to safeguard access to medicines and promote health - for example, via plain packaging. They must also have the freedom to regulate content and marketing of unhealthy foods.

Finally, a robust solution to address omnipresent concerns over conflicts of interest must be found if countries are to even begin controlling the NCD epidemic. We fully support WHO's

efforts in seeking such a solution.

Thank you.