

Statement to the 148th session of the WHO Executive Board

Agenda Item 19.2

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, between non-state actors, WHO and governing bodies as additional opportunities 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 NGOs 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 – a role which is very different from that of trade associations, philanthropic foundations/donors and other non-state actors.

Our overriding concern is that the 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, all with specialist expertise in aspects of WHO's work. Moreover, corralling 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 or obscure conflicts of interest inherent in multi-actor engagement.