

18 May 2021

HAI Statement on The Oslo Medicines Initiative at the WHO Virtual Consultation with Non-State Actors, 31 March 2021

Health Action International (HAI) welcomes the Oslo Medicine initiative and commends the leadership of the government of Norway. We thank the European Regional office of the World Health Organisation (WHO) for allowing Non-State Actors to contribute to the early stages of this project.

The issue of high prices of medicines have been atop of the public agenda for some time. The fact that it is now affecting wealthier countries has given the issue a renewed sense of urgency. As some speakers have already noted, there is a correlation between IP-based monopolies, through patents and other mechanisms, and high prices. We need to counter IP misuse and abuse and subordinate its enforcement to public health interests. Norway has a good opportunity to advance in this direction when guiding, as chair of the TRIPS council, the discussions around the TRIPS waiver proposal submitted by India and South Africa. In a time of pandemic there should be no room for production-limiting market exclusivities.

While we welcome the participation of all stakeholders and concerned parties in discussions around access to medicines, we ask that stringent conflict of interests and high transparency standards be upheld in all partnerships and cooperation instances between governments and multilateral organisations with industry and private interest groups. Transparency can not only be a goal but needs to be a strategy to achieve, defend and promote global health by, for example, making clinical trial information widely accessible and research and development costs independently assessed. That is why, together with many other organisations, we believe that WHO Covid-19 Technologies Access Pool can not only make a difference in the fight against the pandemic but also enable a more collaborative and participative thus efficient research, development, and manufacturing of health technologies.

Finally, we believe for this initiative to be successful it is needed to be framed, regionally, within ongoing initiatives and resolutions specially the Global Strategy and Plan of Action on Public Health, Innovation and Intellectual property and the transparency of markets for medicines, vaccines, and other health products; simultaneously it needs to align itself with ongoing discussion within the European Union, especially around the European Pharmaceutical Strategy and European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) with specific attention to such critical issues as how to eradicate shortages and ensure public return on public investment.

