

Corporate Accountability International

64th WHA May 2011 Agenda Item 11: “*The future of financing for WHO: World Health Organization: reforms for a healthy future*”. Report by the GG A64/4 (5 May 2011) and Report A64/INF.DOC./5

Intervention delivered by Patti Rundall,, IBFAN/CAI

Thank you Mr Chairman for allowing me the opportunity to speak. Corporate Accountability International is very concerned about the proposed World Health Forum (WHF) which is presented as an essential element of the global health governance system. We understand the efforts to ensure the WHO remains a sustainable and viable international organization. However, as many others have said, we do have concerns about the WHF, as proposed, as it could serve to undermine the principles of democratic governance, and the independence and effectiveness of WHO and could serve to increase the power of the already disproportionately powerful for-profit sector.

We urge Member States to reconsider this draft resolution for the following reasons:

1. WHO is an intergovernmental organization with a constitutional mandate to ensure the fundamental right of every human being without distinction to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health. WHO must protect its independence, integrity in decision making and its reputation. It must also guard against manipulation of its governing bodies by private interest actors. We believe this Forum, as described, could undermine the WHO's ability to fulfill this mandate. How can WHO meet its mandate if it also has to meet the expectations of commercial actors – as the report suggests.
2. It is also proposed that the multi-stakeholder forum will “identify future priorities in global health.” This is a reason for serious concern as it is the WHA's responsibility to set health priorities, benchmarks and standards which will effectively protect health for all. Previous experience with multi-stakeholder initiatives shows that health priorities and objectives are distorted when they have to be agreed by disproportionately powerful for-profit actors, whose duties and responsibilities are ultimately to their shareholders and employees. Corporate Accountability International's experience on tobacco and IBFAN's experience on baby foods illustrate how these industries systematically undermine Member States' regulatory efforts in line with the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and WHA's resolutions.
3. The proposed WHF could institutionalize conflicts of interest as the norm within WHO by extending the role of policy and decision shaping to for-profit actors that have an interest in the outcome. WHF could pose a risk, in that it may compromise and distort international and national agreed public health priorities and policies. This is ever more worrying in the absence of a strong and clear WHO policy on conflicts of interest. Transparency, currently promoted as the answer to the problem of conflicts of interest, is an essential requirement but it is not a sufficient safeguard in and of itself. It helps identify conflicts of interest, but does not deal with them directly. This issue has to be tackled clearly. The tobacco industry is not the only problem.
4. The proposed WHF may not achieve the number of outputs desired. It seems only to address financing.
5. Another critical point worth mentioning is that the oversight of the Reform is identified as a Global Policy Group which, as defined, contains no Member States. This is a really important point. Thank you for your attention.